

THE PENGUIN

New Writing

Paul Bowles: By the Water

William Sansom: A Wedding

Vitaliano Brancati: Sebastiana

Donald Ford: The Green Door

Tom Hopkinson: The Matelot and the Piece of Cake

Kathleen Raine: Michael Roberts

Robert Liddell: Angelos Sikelianos

J. P. Hodin: Cornish Renaissance

John Lehmann: The Life of the Prodigal Son

Poems by C. Day Lewis, Anne Ridler, J. C. Hall,

Hal Summers, Saba, Lynette Roberts and Denton Welch

Illustrations by Figari, Cavalcanti

Sven Berlin and others

EDITED BY JOHN LEHMANN

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NEW WRITING

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NEW WRITING

Edited by
JOHN LEHMANN

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About the new contributors

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UMBERTO SABA was born at Trieste where he still lives, and keeps a bookshop. He is recognized as one of the leading Italian poets, and has had numerous volumes published, including *Mediterranee* from which the two poems translated in this issue are taken. He has had considerable influence on the younger school of Italian poets.

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ROBERT LIDDELL was born in 1908, educated at Haileybury and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He has worked on the staff of The Bodleian Library, has travelled in many countries, and is now Lecturer in English Literature in Fuad I University, Cairo. He has published three novels, a book of stories and a critical work, *A Treatise on the Novel* (Jonathan Cape, 1947).

KATHLEEN RAINE is well-known as a poet and critic and for her translations from the French. Her latest published work is a collection of poems *The Pythoness* (Hamish Hamilton). Her friendship with Michael Roberts began at Cambridge and lasted until his death in 1948, and *The Pythoness* is dedicated to him and to his wife, Janet Adam Smith.

J. P. HODIN is an Art Historian and has written several books on modern art: he contributes to leading art reviews in England, America, Switzerland, Sweden and Norway.

Foreword

By the time this number of *Penguin New Writing* has appeared, the long enforced veto on the publication of new magazines – apart from the stunted shadow existence the regulations allowed, like the one letter a month a condemned felon may write, – will at last have been lifted. *Penguin New Writing*, always, even during the time of its most frequent appearances, an occasional book rather than a magazine by classification, never came under this ban; but we saw with regret much enterprise stifled, and with rejoicing some luckier ventures fortified by the chance denial of competition, – lucky as seldom literary magazines have been in this century, but, in one or two salient cases, as seldom deserving.

What of the future? Peering into our crystal ball in this strange season of January Spring, we saw a glorious literary Spring unfolding at the return of the swallows ... A group of young ex-service men had founded at last the monthly to propagate the artistic ideals of which they had vowed themselves devotees seven years ago in the Middle East. The bolder wits, both male and female, of Oxford and Cambridge, had joined together to produce a magazine appearing twice a term which glittered with all the lively exercise of intelligence and imagination the elder critics had long declared moribund in the land. Three poets of a middle generation, remembering how closely allied, in English literary history, the finest criticism and the finest poetry have always proved themselves, had issued the first number of a quarterly that was to establish the criterion of excellence in the arts of the 'fifties. An entirely unknown young man, with no credentials except enthusiasm and flair, suddenly appeared to bewitch the jaded *litterateurs* of London into writing as they

always dreamed they could have written, in a magazine he named *Plato's Cave* ... Alas, as we lifted our eyes from the crystal, the old gloomy doubts assailed us. Would it pay? And if not, would benevolent uncles and guilt-ridden heirs of private enterprise still be able to stand the racket? Would even the toughest, the most inventive newcomer be able to overcome the gradual seeping away of subscriptions amid the usual chorus of polite but sterile praise? Would one be driven to introduce a Woman's Page, a Week-end Gardening Talk, and a Film Star Competition? Would it need – most terrible thought of all – a new war to revive interest in the battles of the spirit, the arts of peace?

Or is it merely that an altered situation, a changed mixture of feeling and thought, is waiting, as so often before, for a new catalyst, a new formula, an new innovator of genius to lead the dance of our to-morrow?

JOHN LEHMANN

Paul Bowles

BY THE WATER

The melting snow dripped from the balconies. People hurried through the little street that always smelled of frying fish. Now and then a stork swooped down, dragging his sticklike legs below him. The small gramophones scraped day and night behind the walls of the shop where young Amar worked and lived. There were few spots in the city where the snow was ever cleared away, and this was not one of them. So it gathered all through the winter months, piling up in front of the shop doors.

But now it was late winter; the sun was warmer. Spring was on the way, to confuse the heart and melt the snow. Amar, being alone in the world, decided it was time to visit a neighbouring city where, so his father once had told him, some cousins lived.

Early in the morning he went to the bus station. It was still dark, and the empty bus came in while he was drinking hot coffee. The road wound through the mountains all the way.

When he arrived in the other city night had already fallen. Here the snow was even deeper in the streets, and it was colder. Because he had not wanted to, Amar had not foreseen this, and it annoyed him to be forced to wrap his bur-nous closely about him as he left the bus station. It was an unfriendly town; he could tell that immediately. Men walked with their heads bent forward, and if they brushed against a passer-by they did not so much as look up. With the exception of the principal street, which had an arc-light every few

metres, there seemed to be no other illumination, and the alleys that led off on either side lay in utter blackness; the white-clad figures that turned into them disappeared straightway.

'A bad town,' said Amar under his breath. He felt proud to be coming from a better and larger city, but his pleasure was mingled with anxiety about the night to be passed in this inimical place. He abandoned the idea of trying to find his cousins before morning, and set about looking for a fondouk or a bath where he might sleep until daybreak.

Only a short distance ahead the street lighting system terminated. Beyond, the street appeared to descend sharply and lose itself in darkness. The snow was uniformly deep here, and not cleared away in patches as it had been nearer the bus station. He puckered his lips and blew his breath ahead of him in little clouds of steam. As he passed over into the unlighted district he heard a few languid notes being strummed on an oud. The music came from a doorway on his left. He paused and listened. Someone approached the doorway from the other direction and inquired, apparently of the man with the oud, if it was 'too late.'

'No,' the musician answered, and he played several more notes.

Amar went over to the door.

'Is there still time?' he said.

'Yes.'

He stepped inside the door. There was no light, but he could feel warm air blowing upon his face from the corridor to the right. He walked ahead, letting his hand run along the damp wall beside him. Soon he came into a large dimly-lit room with a tile floor. Here and there, at various angles, figures lay asleep, wrapped in grey blankets. In a far corner a group of men, partially dressed, sat about a burning brazier, drinking tea and talking in low tones. Amar slowly approached them, taking care not to step on the sleepers.

The air was oppressively warm and moist.

'Where is the bath?' said Amar.

'Down there,' answered one of the men in the group, without even looking up. He indicated the dark corner to his left. And, indeed, now that Amar considered it, it seemed to him that a warm current of air came up from that part of the room. He went in the direction of the dark corner, undressed, and, leaving his clothes in a neat pile on a piece of straw matting, walked toward the warmth. He was thinking of the misfortune he had encountered in arriving in this town at nightfall, and he wondered if his clothes would be molested during his absence. He wore his money in a leather pouch which hung on a string about his neck. Feeling vaguely for the purse under his chin, he turned around to look once again at his clothing. No one seemed to have noticed him as he undressed. He went on. It would not do to seem too distrustful. He would be embroiled immediately in a quarrel which could only end badly for him.

A little boy rushed out of the darkness toward him, calling: 'Follow me, Sidi. I shall lead you to the bath.' He was extremely dirty and ragged, and looked rather more like a midget than a child. Leading the way, he chattered as they went down the slippery, warm steps in the dark. 'You will call for Brahim when you want your tea? You're a stranger. You have much money ...'

Amar cut him short. 'You'll get your coins when you come to wake me up in the morning. Not to-night.'

'But, Sidi! I'm not allowed in the big room. I stay in the doorway and show gentlemen down to the bath. Then I go back to the doorway. I can't wake you.'

'I'll sleep near the doorway. It's warmer there in any case.'

'Lazrag will be angry and terrible things will happen. I'll never get home again, or if I do I might be a bird so my parents will not know me. That's what Lazrag does when he gets angry.'

'Lazrag?'

'It is his place here. You'll see him. He never goes out. If he did the sun would burn him in one second, like a straw

in the fire. He would fall down in the street burned black the minute he stepped out of the door. He was born down here in the grotto.'

Amar was not paying strict attention to the boy's babble. They were descending a wet stone ramp, putting one foot before the other slowly in the dark, and feeling the rough wall carefully as they went. There was the sound of splashing water and voices ahead.

'This is a strange hammam,' said Amar. 'Is there a pool full of water?'

'A pool? You've never heard of Lazrag's grotto? It goes on for ever, and it's made of deep warm water.'

As the boy spoke, they came out on to a stone balcony a few metres above the beginning of a very large pool, lighted beneath where they stood by two bare electric bulbs, and stretching away through the dimness into utter dark beyond. Parts of the roof hung down like grey icicles. Amar looked about in wonder. It was very warm down here. A slight pall of steam lay above the surface of the water, rising constantly in wisps toward the rocky ceiling. A man dripping with water ran past them and dived in. Several more were swimming about in the brighter region near the lights, never straying beyond into the gloom. The plunging and shouting echoed violently beneath the low ceiling.

Amar was not a good swimmer. He turned to ask the boy: 'Is it deep?' but his guide had already disappeared up the ramp. He stepped backward and leaned against the rock wall. There was a low chair to his right, and in the murky light it seemed to him that a small figure was close beside it. He watched the bathers for a few minutes. Those standing at the edge of the water soaped themselves assiduously; those in the water swam to and fro in a short radius below the lights. Suddenly a deep voice spoke close beside him. He looked down as he heard it say: 'Who are you?'

The creature's head was large; its body was small and it had no legs or arms. The lower part of the trunk ended in two flipperlike pieces of flesh. From the shoulders grew

short pincers. It was a man, and it was looking up at him from the floor where it stood.

'Who are you?' it said again, and its tone was unmistakably hostile.

Amar hesitated. 'I came to bathe and sleep,' he said at last.

'Who gave you permission?'

'The man at the entrance.'

'Get out. I don't know you.'

Amar was filled with anger. He looked down with scorn at the little being, and stepped away from it to join the men washing themselves by the water's edge. But more swiftly than he moved, it managed to throw itself along the floor until it was in front of him, when it raised itself again and spoke.

'You think you can bathe when I tell you to get out?' It laughed shortly, a thin sound, but deep in pitch. Then it moved closer and pushed its head against Amar's legs. He drew back his foot and kicked the head, not very hard, but with enough firmness to send the body off balance. The little creature rolled over in silence, making efforts with its neck to keep from reaching the edge of the platform. The men all looked up, an expression of fear on their faces. As the little creature went over the edge it yelled. The splash was like that of a large stone. Two men already in the water swam quickly to the spot. The others started up after Amar, shouting: 'He hit Lazrag!'

Bewildered and frightened, Amar turned and ran back to the ramp. In the blackness he stumbled upward. Part of the wall scraped his bare thigh. The voices behind him grew louder and more excited.

He reached the room where he had left his clothing. Nothing had changed. The men still sat by the brazier talking. Quickly he snatched the pile of garments, and struggling into his burnous, he ran to the door that led into the street, the rest of his clothes tucked under his arm. The man in the doorway with the oud looked at him with a startled face and called after him. Amar ran up the street barelegged toward

the centre of the town. He wanted to be where there were some bright lights. The few people walking in the street paid him no attention. When he got to the bus station it was closed. He went into a small park opposite, where the iron bandstand stood deep in snow. There on a cold stone bench he sat and dressed himself as unostentatiously as possible, using his burnous as a screen. He was shivering, reflecting bitterly upon his poor luck, and wishing he had not left his own town, when a small figure approached him in the half-light.

'Sidi,' it said, 'come with me. Lazrag is hunting for you.'

'Where to?' said Amar, recognizing the urchin from the bath.

'My grandfather's.'

The boy began to run, motioning him to follow. They went through alleys and tunnels, into the most congested part of the town. The boy did not bother to look back, but Amar, being uneasy, turned occasionally to glance behind him. They finally paused before a small door at the side of a narrow passageway. The boy knocked vigorously. From within came a cracked voice calling: '*Echkoon?*'

'*Ana! Brahim!*' cried the boy.

With great deliberation the old man swung the door open and stood looking at Amar.

'Come in,' he finally said; and shutting the door behind them he led them through the courtyard filled with goats into an inner room where a feeble light was flickering. He peered sternly into Amar's face.

'He wants to stay here to-night,' explained the boy.

'Does he think this is a *fondouk*?'

'He has money,' said Brahim hopefully.

'Money!' the old man cried with scorn. 'That's what you learn in the *hammam*! How to steal money! How to take money from men's purses! Now you bring them here! What do you want me to do? Kill him and get his purse for you? Is he too clever for you? You can't get it by yourself? Is that it?' The old man's voice had risen to a scream, and

he gestured violently in his mounting excitement. He sat down on a cushion with difficulty and was silent a moment.

'Money,' he said again, finally. 'Let him go to a fondouk. Take him to the hammam. Why aren't you there?' He looked suspiciously at his grandson.

The boy clutched at his friend's sleeve. 'Come,' he said, pulling him out into the courtyard.

'Take him to the hammam!' yelled the old man. 'Let him spend his money there!'

Together they went back into the dark streets.

'Lazrag is looking for you,' said the boy. 'Twenty men will be going through the town to catch you and take you back to him. He is very angry and he will change you into a bird.'

'Where are we going now?' asked Amar gruffly. He was cold and very tired, and although he said to himself that he did not really believe the boy's story, he wished he were out of the unfriendly town.

'We must walk as far as we can from here. All night. In the morning we'll be far away in the mountains, and they won't find us. We can go to your city.'

Amar did not answer. He was pleased that the boy wanted to stay with him, but he did not think it fitting to say so. They followed one crooked street downhill until all the houses had been left behind and they were in the open country. Presently the path led down a narrow valley, and joined the highway at one end of a small bridge. Here the snow was packed down by the passage of vehicles, and they found it much easier to walk along.

When they had been going down the road for perhaps an hour in the increasing cold, a great truck came rolling by. It stopped just ahead and the driver, an Arab, offered them a ride on top. They climbed up and made a nest of some empty sacks. The boy was very happy to be rushing through the air in the dark night. Mountains and stars whirled by above his head and the truck made a powerful roaring noise as it travelled along the empty highway.

'Lazrag has found us and changed us both into birds!' he cried when he could no longer keep his delight to himself. 'No one will ever know us again.'

Amar grunted and went to sleep. But the boy watched the sky and the trees and the cliffs for a long time before he closed his eyes.

Some time before morning the truck stopped by a spring for water.

In the stillness the boy awoke. A cock crowed in the distance, and then he heard the driver pouring water. The cock crowed again, a sad, thin arc of sound away in the cold murk of the plain. It was not yet dawn. He buried himself deeper in the pile of sacks and rags, and felt the warmth of Amar as he slept.

When daylight came they were in another part of the land. There was no snow. Instead, the almond trees were in flower on the hillsides as they sped past. The road went on unwinding as it dropped lower and lower, until suddenly it came out of the hills upon a spot below which lay a glittering emptiness. Amar and the boy watched it and said to each other that it must be the sea, shining in the morning light.

The spring wind pushed the foam from the waves along the beach; it rippled their garments landward as Amar and the boy walked by the edge of the water. Finally they found a sheltered spot between rocks, and undressed, leaving their clothes on the sand. The boy was afraid to go into the water, and found enough excitement in letting the waves break about his legs, but Amar tried to drag him out further.

'No, no!'

'Come,' Amar urged him.

Amar looked down. Approaching him sideways was an enormous crab which had crawled out from a dark place in the rocks. He leapt back in terror, lost his balance, and fell heavily, striking his head against one of the great boulders. The boy stood perfectly still watching the creature make its cautious way toward Amar through the tips of the breaking

waves. Amar lay without moving, rivulets of water and sand running down his face. As the crab reached his feet, the boy bounded into the air, and in a voice made hoarse by desperation, screamed: 'Lazrag!'

The crab scuttled swiftly behind the rock and disappeared. The boy's face became radiant. He rushed to Amar, lifted his head above a newly-breaking wave, and slapped his cheeks excitedly.

'Amar! I made him go away!' he shouted. 'I saved you!'

If he did not move, the pain was not too great. So Amar lay still, feeling the warm sunlight, the soft water washing over him, and the cool, sweet wind that came in from the sea. He also felt the boy trembling in his effort to hold his head above the waves, and he heard him saying many times over: 'I saved you, Amar.'

After a long time he answered: 'Yes.'

C. Day Lewis

BUS TO FLORENCE

(From work in progress: *An Italian Visit*)

In the white piazza today is barely awake.

A well-water breeze freshens

Her nakedness, musky with love, and wafts about

Her breath of moist carnations.

Oh the beautiful creature, still in a dream pinioned,

A flutter of meadowsweet thighs!

How she clings to the night, whose fingertips haunt her waxen

Body! Look at the eyes

Opening – pale, drenched, languid as aquamarines!

They are open. The mere-smooth light

Starts glancing all over the city in jets and sparklets

Like a charm of goldfinches in flight.

The tousled alleys stretch. Tall windows blink.

Hour of alarum clocks and laces.

Sprinklers dust off the streets. The shops hum gently

As they make up their morning faces.

And today comes out like a bride, a different woman,

Subtler in hue, hazier,

Until the pensive mist goes, shyly avowing

Such a zenith of shameless azure.

This is our day: we mean

To make much of her, tune to her pitch. The enchanting
creature

Travels with us. For once

There will be no twinge of parting in a departure.

So eager she is to be off,

Spilling her armful of roses and mignonette,

Her light feet restlessly echoed

From campanile and wristwatch (will they forget?)

Be late?) What a stir and lustre
Ripple the white square at a lift of her hand!
Look! she has seen us, she points to
That blue bus with the scarab-like trailer behind.

We went the Cassian Way, a route for legions,
We and the May morning.

Rome flaked off in stucco; blear-eyed villas
Melancholiac under their awnings.

Rome peeled off like a cataract. Clear beyond us
A vision good to believe in –

The Campagna with its longdrawn sighs of grass
Heaving, heaving to heaven.

This young-old terrain of asphodel and tufo
Opening its heart to the sun,

Was it sighing for death like Tithonus, or still athirst for
Immortal dew? ... We run

Towards Tuscany now through a no-man's-land where
stilted

Aqueducts dryly scale

The distance and sport the lizard his antediluvian
Head and tendril tail.

But soon the road rivers between flowerbanks:

Such a fume and flamboyance of purple
Vetch, of champions, poppy, wild rose, gladioli,
Bugloss! The flowery people,

Come out in their best to line our route, how they wave at
The carnival progress! And higher,

The foothills flush with sanfoin, salutes of broom
Are setting the rocks on fire.

Sutri, Viterbo, Montefiascone passed:

Each village, it seemed, was making
A silent bar in the music, the road's hurdy-gurdy
Winding, the tambourine shaking

Of sunlit leaves. You tatterdemalion townships –

Elegance freaked with decay –

Your shuttered looks and your black doormouths gaping

Dumb in the heat of the day
Reject, unanswered, the engine's urgent beat.
But now, groves of acacia
Swing their honeybells peal upon peal to welcome us
Over the vibrant, azure,
Deep organ chords of Bolsena, the silvery wavelets
Trilling tranquillamente.
That music followed us for miles, until
We came to Acquapendente.

Eyes grown used to the light, we were finding our form and
meeting
Impressions squarely.
Yet, where all was new, changeful, idyllic, it saddened
To think how rarely
More than a few snippets remain from the offered fabric,
And they not always
The ones we'd have chosen. It's sequence I lack, the talent
to grasp
Not a here-and-there phrase
But the music entire, its original stream and logic. I'd better
Accept this, perhaps,
As nature's way: matter, the physicists tell one, is largely
A matter of gaps.

Another stage, and a change of key. Listen!
Rosetted oxen move –
The milky skins, the loose-kneed watersilk gait of
Priestesses vowed to Love.
A road stubborn with stone pines. Shrines at the roadside.
A sandstone cliff, where caves
Open divining mouths: in this or that one
A skeleton sibyl raves.
Signs and omens ... We approached the haunts of
The mystery-loving Etruscans.
Earth's face grew rapidly older, ravine-wrinkled,
Shadowed with brooding dusk on

Temple and cheek. Mountains multiplied round us
And the flowery guise shredded off as we
Climbed past boulders and gaunt grass high into
A landscape haggard as prophecy,
Scarred with bone-white riverbeds like veins
Of inspiration run dry.
Still what a journey away the apocalypse! See it –
A tower, a town in the sky!
A child from the flowering vale, a youth from the foothills
May catch glimpses of death
Remote as a star, irrelevant, all of a life-time
Ahead, less landmark than myth.
For ages it seems no nearer. But imperceptibly
The road, twisting and doubling
As if to delay or avoid it, underlines
That Presence: the man is troubled,
Feeling the road beneath him being hauled in now
Like slack, the magnetic power
Of what it had always led to over the dreaming
Hills and the fable of flowers.
So, while the bus toiled upwards and the Apennines
Swirled like vapours about it,
That town in the sky stayed constant and loomed nearer
Till we could no more doubt it;
And soon, though still afar off, it darkly foretold us
We were destined to pass that way,
We passed by the thundercloud castle of Radicofani
At the pinnacle of our day.

The wrack of cloud, the surly ruinous tower
Stubborn upon the verge of recognition –
What haunts and weights them so?
Memory, or premonition?
Why should a mouldering finger in the sky,
An hour of cloud that drifts and passes, mean
More than the flowering vale,
The volcanic ravine?

A driven heart, a raven-shadowing mind
Loom above all my pastorals, impend
 My traveller's joy with fears
 That travelling has no end.

But on without pause from that eyrie the bus, swooping,
 Checking and swooping, descends:
The road cascades down the hillface in blonde ringlets
 Looped up with hairpin bends.
The sun rides out. The calcined earth grows mellow
 With place-names sleek as oil –
Montepulciano, Montalcino, Murlo,
 Castiglione. The soil
Acknowledges man again, his hand which husbands
 Each yielding inch and endures
To set the vine amid armies, the olive between
 Death's adamantine spurs.
Presently, on a constellation of three hills,
 We saw crowning the plain a
Town from a missal, a huddle of towers and houses,
 Medieval Siena.
A gorge of a street, anfractuous, narrow. Our bus
 Crawled up it, stemming a torrent
Of faces – the faces impetuous, proud, intransigent
 Of those who had fought with Florence
For Tuscany. Was it a demonstration they flocked to?
 A miracle? Or some huger
Event? We left the bus stranded amongst them, a monster
 Thrown up from their fathomless future,
And strolled into a far-off present, an age
 Where all is emblematic,
Pure, and without perspective. The twining passages,
 Diagrams of some classic
Doctrinal knot, lap over and under one another.
 The swan-necked Mangia tower
With its ruff stands, clear as Babel, for pride: beneath it,
 Shaped like a scallop, that square

Might be humility's dewpond, or the rose-madder
Shell from which Aphrodite
Once stepped ashore. And the west front of the Duomo –
How it images, flight upon flight, the
Ascending torrent, a multitude without number
Intent on their timeless way
From the world of St. Catherine, Boccaccio and Fiammetta
Towards the judgement day!

A township cast up high and dry from an age
When the whole universe
Of stars lived in man's parish
And the zodiac told his fortune, chapter and verse.
A simple time – salvation or damnation
One black and white device,
Eternity foreshortened,
Earth a mere trusting step from Paradise.
O life where mystery grew on every bush,
Saints, tyrants, thrill and throes
Were for one end! – the traveller
Dips into your dream, and sighing, goes.

After two hours we went on, for our destination
Called. The adagio dance
Of olives, their immemorial routine and eccentric
Variations of stance;
The vines that flourished like semaphore alphabets endlessly
Flagging from hill to hill: –
We knew them by heart now (or never would), seeing them
tiny
And common as tormentil.
Florence invisibly haled us. The intervening
Grew misted with expectations,
Diminished yet weirdly prolonged, as all the go-between
World by a lover's impatience.
Through Poggibonsi we glided – a clown's name
And a history of hard knocks:

But nothing was real till at length we entered the nonpareil
City ... A hand unlocks
The traveller's trance. We alight. And the just coming down to
Earth, the pure sense of arrival,
More than visions or masterpieces, fulfil
One need for which we travel.

This day, my bride of a day,
Went with me hand in hand the centuried road :
I through her charmed eyes gazing,
She hanging on my words, peace overflowed.
But now, a rose-gold Eve,
With the deep look of one who will unbosom
Her sweetest to death only,
She opens out, she flames and falls like blossom.
A spray that lightly trembles
After the warbler's flown. A cloud vibrating
In the wash of the hull-down sun.
My heart rocks on. Remembering, or awaiting?

William Sansom

A WEDDING

We had decided to visit a small Lapp church some kilometres away, and for this reason had ordered a sled. It was early afternoon, brisk, cold: snow lay thick over the gentle slopes, and more fell miraculously from a clear sky – it snowed from a clear blue sky! Such snow must have been blown from a range of golden clouds far off on the horizon. It fell thickly, powdering the elkhide rugs, drawing steam from the wet flanks of our monstrous horse, crusting and beetling our eyebrows with white so that sometimes it seemed the sled carried a convention of red-cheeked, fur-capped gnome-creatures. The air tasted clear; cold draughts iced the inside of the nose, which then pleasantly warmed from warmer breath exhaled – the sensation, more than the smell, of winter.

This was wild country, among mountains, itself high up. But the mountains lay round like placid white whales – with no jagged peaks they rolled mellifluously, gentle and sleeping under their blanket of snow. Forgotten soon – as we raced between the flickering firs, or down an iced track between soft mounds of wind-moulded snow – forgotten soon was the warm wooden mountain hotel with its steam-heat, its champagne served in silver buckets foamed with snow, its walls painted deep red and dark blue, colours exactly of the Bedouin and of Moroccan leather. Here among the black firs and by smooth frozen lakes the great elk, enormous and morose, still wandered wild; and here the wolverine glutton, heavy and voracious, dropped from the fir branch to bury its teeth in soft reindeer neck. Large red-eyed owls trailed their curious skirts, tall foxes limped orange and sharp, reindeer herds passed like grey clouds across the

white mountains. But we saw none of these on that day: what impressed more was the keen, unbroken quiet – the whole wide white country lay still and silent, only the trotting jingle of our sleigh-bell broke the air and this itself seemed drawn away and lost at each quivering peal.

Firs giddied by like giant railings, once we crossed a frozen river where a thin stream of purple-black water cascaded through banks of iced snow green as almond paste – and soon after this the driver half-turned in his dog-skin coat and motioned with his whip: ahead lay the village of V —.

No more than a dozen wood houses, all glowing against the snow with the dark blood-red that so distinguishes the Swedish countryside. Peat-roofs for the most part, grey antlers strung over the doors. We stood up from the sled and stretched. Stood up – for the sled was no romantic wrought-iron sleigh with plush and padded seats, but a low flexible box of wood, padded only with green fodder grass which now that monstrous horse, moustached like a tartar, began reflectively to munch. We stretched – the snow had stopped – and started up towards the church; but on the way, walking along the road, saw for the first time that strange figure around whom this account properly centres.

He was a man middle-aged, tallish, ordinary enough. Only his clothes distinguished him. In a country where people wore fur caps or the long-peaked caps of skiers, this man wore an English fisherman's tweed hat; and over a stock and blue waistcoat, an English hacking jacket; below, ordinary black ski trousers and reindeer hide boots. In fact a sort of centaur – half Lapp and half English squire. He smoked a small silver pipe.

We passed him on the track; and in that lonely place, in a country where naturally one greets the next man, he strode rather than walked past us, his face forcefully forward, his chin raised, absorbed either in himself or in the effort to appear absorbed. One was not quite sure whether the

impression he gave was that of an actor, or of something more superior and visionary in his own right.

He passed, and we went on up to the church. The snow-drifts thickened, great hummocks of snow sparkled in the soft sun. A wandering husky, clean and friendly and finely furred, attached himself to us. Then we were at the door of the church, turning the hand-size brass key in its heavy wooden door. That door indeed was heavy and large, for the church was very small – a plain white classic church, not holding more than a hundred or so. Nothing much to look at inside – the usual emblems of the sun in this most sun-conscious land; an altar with a pulpit centred above it; and the knowledge that this lonely holy place was opened only twice a year, when all accumulated marriage and christening and funeral ceremonies of the Lapp congregation were performed at once.

Back in the village we stood admiring the effects of the setting sun on the great panorama surrounding our eminence, the snow now all pale rose. Then – once again that curious figure passed, stalking along the track regardless, as before, of anyone else. I remember we smiled among ourselves, and this time turned to the villager with us – the man to whom we had just returned the key – and asked him who this strange figure might be. For a moment he looked at us vaguely, not understanding. Then one of the little Lapps with him – there was a small group standing there, the group that so surely accumulates in the loneliest country round any kind of equipage about to move off – one of these two or three Lapps pointed to the English figure and said something in his language. The Swede shook his head and smiled, realizing.

‘Him? The Husband? I didn’t see you meant him – we’re used to him about here. He lives in the big house.’

He pointed up the slope to where, behind a scattering of birches cream against the snow, the roof and great chimney of a house showed. We asked:

‘The Husband? But who is he? Is he English?’

'English, yes. He took the house. He was married here, in the church. He always comes back. Once, twice, three times each year.'

'Back?'

'From somewhere. From foreign parts. England, France maybe. But he always comes back here. Here and to the bridge, it's a strange affair.'

'Well tell us. And his wife?'

'Dead. Dead the first day.'

He was not at all willing to go on. He looked from us to the Lapps, and whispered how the story was not liked, how it had become a sort of legend among the people there, and an evil legend. Among these little people, themselves magicians still versed in pagan lore, who still sang of special musics heard in stone and tree and river, the tale had grown its intuitive curse. But we pressed the man, and doubtfully he began. Possibly he thought it was not so bad, since he told it in Swedish. And gradually, as he spoke, he warmed to the story – for it turned out it was particularly his, since it concerned the church and he was the man who kept the key. The Lapps stood silently, one could not see whether they approved or not from their wizened mongolian faces. And our friend the Swede took us back to a night some ten years ago, a night also in winter ...

'I woke up,' he said, 'quite as usual in the middle of the night, some time after twelve, and went out. I remember the night well, the moon up and making long shadows of the trees. Clear. And as it was light, I left the door of where I was sitting open. I remember the peace of it, no wind and no cloud. And yet, quiet and white as the night was, I knew a restless feeling. As if I had seen something and not remembered it. As if something was not quite right about it. And when I got up and went out again I knew what it was.'

He told us how the outhouse was at the back, his house had hidden what it was until he came walking round to the front, restless. And then he saw, up the slowly rising hill,

that lonely church had lights blazing from every window! Isolated, in the white moonlight, with all the miles of mountain moonlight silent around, yet itself yellow with light and strangely festive.

We stood there and looked up at the church as he told us in rising voice of that long-ago night. With its eyed bell-tower questioning upright at one end, and the small nave beneath, it looked something like a lonely mountain goat; it was the same shape, and alone in the mirage of slopes one needed guidance to define exactly the size of any such distant object. And now as we listened and looked, the setting of the sun told against the moonlit story – yet added to its magic. For with its northern low slow setting, the horizontal sunglow made a fantasy of the place: the sky turned soft lavender, the snow ranged luminescent from rose to palest gold, what trees there were took a sacrificial copper to their trunks, far-away clouds against the lavender sky showed bright blue like washed cloth, and above all the moon shone out apple-green like a bewitched jewel. Such colour looked impossible – but it was so. And fixed so in the clear mountain air, as if all seen through glass. Colour in this strange North such as is never seen in the traditionally colourful lands of the Mediterranean. The sun made magic of everything: and within this magic – against which one could smell petrol fumes, smoke cigarettes, blow one's nose and switch jazz from radio – there lived the small curious Lapps, still in hide wigwams, still herding their fur-horned reindeer as through the immemorial cold past.

But on the night of which that villager spoke there had been a white moon, and clear shadows from the trees. And one can well imagine the fleet of cars drawn up by the church, left still in processional order, gleaming in the moonlight. Great American cars they were, with beetled bonnets and steel faces, toothed of radiator and eyed with silver lamps, silent gliders and gluttons of the road. And now so near the Arctic circle muffed and chained, piled with the skins of deer and cloths weaved in the Swedish peasant lands: for this

was a rich cortège, there was a magnificence such as our friend the church janitor had never seen.

‘I had not been out much,’ he said, ‘that day. I knew the key to the church must be in its place in my cupboard. And seeing that wild light flaring and those motors – such motors as I’d never seen before – I thought twice before telling myself it was my duty to go up there. Even then, I went slowly. I remember turning round half-way, and looking back at the village – somehow to make sure I was in my right mind. But there were the houses, quiet, asleep in the moonlight. And up above there the church, like a ghost with all its light.

‘I skirted those cars. They looked empty – as if they had driven themselves there, each sharp and ready in the moonlight, all ranged in file so you might think at any moment they’d drive off with their nobodies inside them, their nobodies sitting up straight and stiff.

‘But then I got to the back of the church and I climbed up to see through the window. And what I saw I’ll never forget.’

He told us how that church was crowded with people. They stood, he said, back against the walls and pressed together, as though they had come to witness something against their will, as though they were fearful yet tempted to be there. They wore strange rich clothes – furs, capes, curious great-coats – that struck the janitor’s mind with an awe of magnificence, but also an uneasiness, as though they were things constructed by a dream. Some carried torches, these flickered and gave a light that blazed brighter than the church lamps that also had been lit, their even glow sad and holy within the great blaze of those others.

All eyes were on a group who stood by the altar. One was a man, also dressed in those foreign clothes, who stood stiffly upright and faced without moving, like the statue of a man, the priest officiating before him.

The other was a girl, pale as her bridal veil.

There were others standing just behind, older people. One elderly white-haired man, though not moving, stood there

in tears. The janitor told us how he remembered the tears in long wet lines down that man's face, from his red eyes to his white beard, glistening wet in the torchlight.

Crouched there outside the tall window, the janitor could hear no word that was said. But there was no question of this being anything but a ceremony of marriage – and it was apparent, too, by a raising in question of the priest's head, when the moment for the husband's response became due. Then indeed a sound could be heard through the window, a response came muffled but strong, an affirmative that must more have been cried out than spoken. And then the priest turned to the bride.

She stood with head bowed, a frail figure in her long dress, a bouquet not of white but of blood-red roses held at her breast. She clasped these tight, in that defenceless place of offering, as if they were a shield, or some last loved possession. Now, as the priest awaited her response, she seemed only to bow further over these flowers.

Then she half-raised her head, half-turned it away from the man at her side and towards the older people standing behind. It was a gesture of last appeal. For the first time the janitor properly saw her face – and in his country idiom he could say little more, but this over and over again repeated, than that it was the face of a princess. Of exquisite grace, of some refined beauty not far from melancholy, not far from joy – such a sort of features, one supposes, must have impressed him. But that her face was pale, pale as the white veil she wore, and that her eyes were shadowed with illness or trouble he could with definition say. She was ashen-haired, yet somehow dark.

All at once the congregation seemed to stiffen, a shudder could be felt in the church, the bride's head was lowered – and as a troubled murmur came from a hundred throats the watcher at the window knew that she had whispered her word of bond.

Then, briefly, the ceremony was brought to an end. The bride, leaning now heavily, it seemed half in faint, on the

arm of her husband, turned to leave the church. And as the silent midnight guests also turned, as those two together walked slowly down the narrow short aisle, the bell from the tower above began to toll.

The janitor told us how the first note of the bell above and with him in the outside night struck with terrible force in his ear. It brought him to his senses, he felt he had been somewhere removed in a dream. Now again, at the bell's insistent tolling, slow and dreadfully sure, more a sound of warning than of joy as its mournful measured note echoed across the mountain, the janitor let himself down to the snow and went skirting the church to a point, deep in drifts, where he could watch these strangers emerge from the door. From there, out in the frosted night, he watched also one light after another being lit in the group of houses down in the village below, and he imagined the unrest and wonder of his friends as they looked out into the night and saw the church thus strangely aglow.

But in the village they were held with the same fear as he – a superstitious fear that stopped each one of them from coming up the hill, the same that stopped him himself, even with his official duty, from daring to inquire the nature of those proceedings.

At last the door swung open, two men swathed in great-coats came out carrying torches high. There followed the others; and last of all came the new husband and his bride.

She seemed to lean on his arm. Perhaps as though she was almost fainting? It was difficult in that light, the light of moon and torches, for the janitor to be sure of what he saw ... Or perhaps that strange young man held her imprisoned by his own strong arm? So many dark figures moving there in the snow! So much whispering, such stamping, such a muffling of bunched furs! And now they had all moved over to a part of open ground away from the church, a place where tombstones lurched in the snow. There they stood and pointed to the ground – they seemed to be discussing the place for a grave. Only the bride's face was averted, she

FIGARI



Self-Portrait

Private Collection

FIGARI



Gaúcho Dance: The *Pericón*

Private Collection



Negro Dance: The *Candombe*

Private Collection

FIGARI



Native Singer

Private Collection

FIGARI



The *Pericón* in the *Patio*

Private Collection



The Old Fashioned Dance

Private Collection

stood, a frailer figure than the others, turning herself away from what they were most plainly trying to show her. Suddenly somebody laughed, one crisp laugh in the night, a sound that came and went like a frosted breath. Then they all turned back to the waiting fleet of cars.

One by one those engines started, the wide night echoed the throb of motors, the snow sparkled clear in the long beams of headlights. Chains on the wheels whisked into their steel muttering, the cortège moved off. Down towards the village. One car turned to the left – all the others with farewell cries moved right to the main road and the south.

In a few minutes all were gone. The silence of the snows again descended. The bell had ceased tolling, the lights in the church had been extinguished. Nothing stirred. Only the dark blue moonlight fell widely everywhere, sparkling a tinsel from iced birch-branches, bringing a great stillness to the black fir-clumps grouped like figures conferring against the white.

‘I stood there a moment,’ the janitor said, ‘and I felt like rubbing my eyes, it seemed impossible that this had ever happened. But then there was the village behind with all its lights on, and I could see now the distant figures of my friends hurrying from house to house. I went up to the church. There in the door, innocent and solitary, was set the brass of my key. How it got there I have never known. At all events somebody knows, somebody took it and gave it them – no stranger was seen about that day. But we’re easy folk in these parts, we leave doors unlocked. Well – you can imagine there was no more sleep for us that night. We settled down to talk it over, we sat down to make a night of it. But that night wasn’t ours anyhow, there was more coming to us yet.

‘It would have been an hour or two after, maybe three hours, one can never tell – when a knock thudded the door of my house where some of us were sitting, and one of our friends here – not these but another Lapp from their camp up the road – put his head round the door and said there

was a stranger hurt. And he helped through the door that man you saw just now.

'He was covered in blood, bleeding from his face' and hands and his head. And I remember how a splinter of wood, a long piece, was hanging from his forehead like a feather.

'He spoke no Swedish, we spoke none of his language. But when we'd given him something warm to drink, he showed us by signs how he'd crashed up a motor he'd been driving. And even wounded as he was, he kept pointing and pointing - reaching to drag the sleeves of our coats, in fact imploring us to go out along the road and look. He was like a dumb dog wanting to show us something. And then of course after the first surprise we saw what it might be, that there would be other people in the motor - and so we hurried away with lanterns.

'We got out a sledge and went as quick as we could up that road, the road to the north. It was the single motor that had smashed, the one that turned off alone. We found it by the bridge, it had gone through the wood railing and crashed front-down into the iced bed of the stream. Underneath it was a woman, dead. Her veil dragged in the water, her poor face was badly cut about, it was blue and open ... but you can imagine.'

And indeed one could well imagine - the searchers round-shaped in their winter coats, the smaller throng of Lapps padded and stuffed out like dolls in winter coats, the lanterns casting about down there on the frozen stream, the great smashed car useless now as the blown body of a dead animal. The bride lying in white, in dreadful peace, her white veil trailing over the green pack-ice, the red flowers strewn like her own blood in the snow ... But nonsense! The lanterns would have flickered weak and yellow there, the veil would have dragged drenched in the cold black water like a rag of washing, the pack-ice could have shown no green but yellow and frosted cold, the blood-flowers lay about like black pockets of thaw, the clear air soiled with petrol and the breathmist of all those moving people, the

body itself twisted and mauled and made the more presenceless by so many dark men moving, by the strength of muscles and flesh and the hard life of leather and warm wool.

The janitor had fallen silent. Now he shrugged his shoulders. He said how they took her out and back on the sledge over the frostbound roads. How the wounded man watched by her. How next day the police came, how they had seen little use in drawing out an exact inquiry with the body moved and all the snow about trampled. How the man had stayed on for the last days.

'She's buried,' he said, 'up by the little church. It was his wish.'

'Poor fellow.'

'And every year, twice a year, in spring and in the winter, he comes back from his country and lives here.'

We said nothing. We only remembered the intent purpose of this man, his purpose that now declaimed its brooding sorrow.

'In winter now he lives up in the big house. He's rich, they say. And every day he takes his walk along there up to the bridge where it happened. He stays there for hours at a time. Always alone.'

We could see him there, his strange figure brooding exiled in the snow. Then in the spring in a country strange as himself, his English coat and stock outlawed by the starring of mountain wildflowers, by a dark red cottage growing bright violets and dwarf fir-trees on its peat roof and with a cropping goat tethered to the chimney – in such a magic land exiled and alone with that night's long-past tragedy. We asked:

'But the wedding. How was that?'

'Oh, it's long ago, we never really knew here.'

'It was real enough, though, and right – they traced the priest ... then the husband would never talk, he brings his own servants with him even now ...'

'Poor fellow.'

The janitor turned suddenly.

‘Poor fellow? I’d wonder about that ...’

‘But ...’

‘I’d wonder about the splinter sticking from his face, I’d think a man might pull out such a thing. And I’d wonder about petals of roses I saw up on the snow on the bridge, I’d wonder how the wind could have brought them up there ... I’d wonder about —’

‘But coming back here as he does, standing up there in sorrow ...’

‘Sorrow?’

The man paused.

‘Up there alone – he sings at the top of his voice, he always sings ...’

Lynette Roberts

TWO POEMS

I

HE ALONE COULD GET ME OUT OF THIS

He alone could get me out of this
But he neither knows nor cares,
After Hell there is a full stop.

The storm in my brain its
High tensional rays,
The sickness in my soul
And the growl and biting grit
That sets me back
Each moment forward I want to fly
Forward on the wake of some aerial device.
Where every moment is fresh
A flower or bird not seen.

To some trespassed spot
Of rippling streams, good natured
Enchantment, ease, and plentiful rest,
Where there is no access to these painful and
Immediate idiosyncrasies:
Where peace is formal, wholesome and pure.
A source from where all
Growth and activity could reside,
Could breed and acquire
A new note and thought,
Conspire with him whom I have recently admonished,
A new forgathering of Spring.

II

LET THE MAN OF DARKNESS OUT

Let the man of darkness out
That he may be free
Calm his face
And lighten his burden
From obscurity into light.

Let him like a tree at night
Grotesque and obscured by
Uncontrollable branches
Merge imperceptibly
Into light.

Take shape out of hedgerow
Clear definite shape
With every idea of creation
Penetrated revealed and known,
Concentrated on His work, on Him,
His illuminating resurrection.

Whether tree, bird or pasture
They carry His name,
And no Book nor human reason
Need cover His mind or seek their own.
The manifestation is here.
Victory over degree,
Man's livery of things unseen.

Donald Ford

THE GREEN DOOR

Preacher Elias was second oldest man in the village. That meant he was second oldest man in the valley, for the men of Pentry are well-known locally for their greedy clutch on life.

Pentry is a small village, and it stands high in the hills at the back end of the valley. The people who live there say that it is the air and the spring water that keep them so well. It is a fact that they live long.

Dry, bitter old men with limbs like winter sticks, and hands crooked like the hands of Death himself. And all of them watching one another to see who is marked next for the grave.

The sound of children is rare in Pentry, and plaintive in its loneliness. And there are only two babies amongst eight hundred people.

The time for the weekly reckoning was Tuesday morning. Tuesday morning the queue formed to draw pensions at Morgans. Everyone called personally; it was a matter of pride. Otherwise the whispers would begin, and people would see the corpse candles. No deputies were allowed, and no excuses listened to.

The whispering outside Morgans had driven more than one of them to their death.

If a man or woman did not appear it was noticed at once and the fact was passed back and forward along the line of grey and bald heads. Then the village would watch for Preacher Elias to set out to console the dying.

Elias never failed to be right. To see him go visiting was to see Death go his rounds.

Evan Boards, the carpenter, followed Preacher Elias certain sure, with his little bit of pencil and his talk of pine, and

oak and lead and brass. Elias was never wrong, and Evan always began to sharpen his plane and turn over his stocks when he saw Preacher set out.

Daddy Pugh Tapleg had not come for his pension for two Tuesdays. The second week his daughter Bron, taking a pension herself, collected for him. Daddy Pugh was marked for the cemetery. Preacher Elias called. Daddy Pugh did not die.

Again, Sunday, after chapel, Preacher Elias called. Still Daddy Pugh lived on. Tuesday came. Daddy Pugh's daughter, Bron, took his pension again.

There was a humming in the crowd, but Bron, being a widow and full of dignity, ignored it all and passed out of Morgans like a queen in her black silk.

Her one failure in life had been to marry a man from Gelly. He had been a big man, strong as an ox and big as a tree, but he died before he was fifty. People said because Bron nagged him so about living.

Bron herself, like a true daughter of Daddy Pugh, lived on hale and hearty.

Daddy Pugh was oldest man in the village, oldest in the valley, and oldest, so he claimed, in all South Wales. But he was not a hundred.

No one in Pentry had ever lived to be a hundred. That was strange. Nineties by the score, but never a hundred. At one time Daddy Pugh was thought to have a good chance. But three weeks not at Morgans! People shook their heads, and money changed hands. Daddy Pugh was booked for the cemetery.

Preacher Elias set out again Tuesday afternoon. As he passed through the village he heard people murmur. He walked big so that they could see how strong he was, not like Daddy Pugh who was dying.

This time people knew that Daddy Tapleg would die. Preacher Elias called once; most people had enough decency left to die and do the proper thing by him and Death. Preacher

Elias called twice, and even those who were being awkward gave up.

Preacher Elias had never called three times before to the same death-bed.

Soon, people were saying, Preacher Elias would be the oldest man in the valley. But Preacher Elias was humble about it, as became a man of God.

He knew they were saying he would get a hundred yet. This idea, since it reflected nothing upon any other of God's creatures, but reflected purely the will of God, he allowed to swell his chest a little as he climbed.

Bron saw him coming from her father's window.

Elias looked like an old black crow with his great cloak caught by the wind; he clawed his way across the mountain face as an old crow does across the sky to its favourite elm.

'Preacher 'Lias coming, da,' she told the old man on the bed.

'Ha! Here? To me again. Envy it is, envy. These seven years I've been two years older than him and oldest man in the place, and now he thinks he can frighten me into dying.'

He paused and listened to the cager spring wind.

'If only my old leg were as good as that one, if only.' Daddy Pugh had one leg of his own and one wooden leg, that was why he was called Tapleg. The wooden leg lay, polished and shining, on a chest of drawers beside the bed. The old man eyed it hungrily.

'Just because I couldn't get to Morgans! But I'm well. Well enough to see Elias dead, the old, black hypocrite.'

'Hush, da, don't excite yourself.'

'I would cut off this other rotten leg,' he whined, 'cut it off with a shining knife, if I could get a leg as good as that old oak one and go down to Morgans again. Two wooden legs and the oldest man in Wales – that would be something.' His child-blue eyes shone with sudden excitement.

'Hush, da, he is here.'

There was the sound of Preacher Elias calling from below.

'Up here, Preacher Elias, in the bedroom we are.' Bron's

voice was strong. Preacher Elias's footsteps were firm on the stairs, then he appeared through the floor of the bedroom.

He paused at the top of the stairs to straighten his cape, and he looked over at the old man on the bed and smiled knowingly as if he shared some secret with Time.

The bedroom was so small that Elias seemed to hover like a great bat, his head stooped under the low ceiling. No one spoke. The old men watched one another while Bron looked back and forward. With a flourish she left them and disappeared down the stairs without saying a word.

Preacher still stood, and seemed, with his black cloak wrapped round him, to grow taller. Daddy Pugh gazed back unblinkingly. It was growing dusk. Preacher Elias's eyes glowed in the darkness of the room under the out-thrust of his brows.

Big, bushy eyebrows Preacher Elias had, and Daddy Pugh without a hair on his head, smooth face, bald top. They looked at one another.

'Sit down and rest, man,' said Daddy Pugh.

'I will, I will. Not because I am tired, look, but because my neck gets cricked, me being so tall.' Preacher sat down.

'You are looking an old man, Daddy Pugh, an old man.'

'Two years older than you, Preacher Elias,' said Daddy Pugh with some satisfaction. 'Two years older than you.'

There was another silence.

Both men felt they had scored a point; Bron, listening at the foot of the stairs made honours even, with her father just the better for getting the last word and being the older man.

'Can you hear Gwyn ap Nudd's hounds, Daddy Pugh? They have called this many a night for you. You do not go.'

'Gwyn isn't looking for me special when he comes to Pentry, Preacher Elias. There are others might go before me. Others I need not name. Others nearer their last day than me, man.'

'Gwyn is looking for you, Daddy. People 'ave seen the corpse candles come down the mountain.'

'But not for me, Preacher Elias, not to my door.'

'Who is there but you, Daddy Pugh? Who else? Are you not next to go?'

'It doesn't happen like that. I have seen many go before me now I am at the age I am. Look at my daughter's husband from Gelly. Dead these many years since, and him a man would have made two of me, round as I am. We don't all go over the edge one after the other, as we came in; some go soon, some go late. There'll be others before me yet.'

'But you are very near the edge.'

'Ay, but my old wooden leg won't let me slip over, old Bess Oak'll save me.'

Again there was silence, a long silence. It grew so long that Bron, full of curiosity, brought up a lamp, appearing through the floor like some old angel in her rusty black silk.

She placed the lamp carefully on the chest of drawers. Its light sparkled on the polished brass of the leg, and its rays made little highlights on the black oak surface of the wood.

The eyes of both Preacher and Daddy Pugh were drawn to the leg.

'Good for a few years yet,' said Daddy Pugh, watching Elias closely.

'Ay, but you'll not be wanting it, man. No more. Gwyn ap Nudd has come for you. You are on your death-bed.'

Bron, with a quick look at her father went downstairs.

'So you think you can frighten me, and tell me when to die. Come often enough and you think Evan Boards will follow, with the shavings in his hair and the smell of pitch-pine on him. You think Evan Boards will take Bessy Oak. I'd sooner drive it straight through your wicked old black heart, Elias Preacher.'

'A man of God and jealous! Have you not stood before the people these years and no one beside you, no one like you, no one to match you? Preacher Elias, Elias Preacher. Always, always. Everything for Elias Preacher. Everything. The women with their big breasts pushing them against you, and you tweaking their backsides.'

'I seen it all. Even the young ones now. I seen it. And then

you was next oldest in the village. Only one between you and the last thing of all. Preacher and oldest man. And you wanted to see me die.

'I ain't dying, man. You see. I ain't dying.'

The old man's querulous voice died away. Preacher said nothing. Perhaps in the shadows he smiled a little, or perhaps it was the trick of light upon his wrinkles. His eyes glowed.

'I can wait, Daddy Pugh. It is so easy for me. I can wait. Can you not see the little green door?'

'What door?' asked the old man, his bird voice curious, his weak eyes quick.

'The little green door that gives on eternity.'

'I can't see no door,' there was triumph in Daddy Pugh's voice, 'I can't see no door, Preacher, green, nor hell fire, nor no colour.'

'You will see it soon. You will go down a long dark tunnel, like the pit, underground, at night. It will all close in on you and at the end, there it will be, the little green door. With a gold knob to it. When you open it the wind of heaven will rush in and you will walk on clouds and pick daisy stars.

'Think of it, Daddy. No wooden leg then, but your own two legs to chase the girls on.'

'But I shall have old Bessy Oak, won't I?' asked Daddy, like a fretful child. 'Old Bessy Oak has been nearest and dearest to me for so long. Nearer than any woman Old Bessy has lain.'

'If you wish we will let you carry her. But your arms should be full of stars. And you will be young. And all the girls will be there that you knew when a lad. With their green-apple breasts and dog-rose cheeks and ripe medlar mouths and their eyes like sloes.'

'Through the green door?'

'With the little gold knob in its middle.'

There was a silence while the old man digested this information.

'That would be a nice place, Preacher.'

'It would.'

'Would it be called Heaven?'

'It might.' There was a further silence. The lamp burned steady; the wind moved round the house like a young dog. They both heard the wind.

'S Spring and the sap rising,' said Preacher.

'Ay, I feel it first in my leg that isn't there. I always feel the Spring first in that.'

Preacher Elias looked at the wooden leg, and then went to touch it.

'Don't you touch it, do you hear? Don't you touch Bessy Oak.'

Daddy Pugh snatched the wooden leg from beneath Elias's hands. 'No one touches Bessy Oak but me.'

Again Elias smiled.

'Can you see the little green door, Daddy?'

'No door.'

'Nor the bright gold knob in the middle shining like a little lamp through the darkness?'

'No. Perhaps. A little bit. A little bit of light.'

'Like the lamp here, Daddy. Like this lamp.'

Daddy Pugh gazed at the lamp, at the golden red flame with its blue base, and then, slowly, shook his head.

'Just open the door a little, Daddy bach, a little bit of a crack and listen. Listen to the voices of the girls, Daddy. All of them young and clean-limbed and golden; their plum blossom skins and their black plum eyes. Think of them, Daddy.'

'I hear the wind, Preacher, only the wind.'

'But I have set the little door ajar for you, Daddy, so it needs but a little push. Just a little push,' his Preacher's voice hummed.

The old man's eyes wavered as his gaze seemed to turn in. There was a growing silence while Preacher watched him.

Then Bron called from the bottom of the stairs. 'Will you have a kipper, da? Fresh to-day with pension money from Morgans?'

Her voice called the old man back from a far distance. His gaze swung to Preacher Elias and he saw disappointment on his face: Daddy Pugh understood. He laughed aloud with joy.

‘Ay, Bron, my good girl, a kipper. Or two if you like. Spending our money like that! But kippers is good. Will you have one, Preacher Elias?’

Preacher drew himself up. He knew he was beaten.

‘One day you will not mock me, Daddy Pugh. One day, when you are roasting and smoking like them kippers are now, then you will call for mercy to Elias who will be walking the fields of Paradise and he will not answer. You will twist, Daddy Pugh, and smoke, Daddy Pugh, and the juices will bubble out of you. I shall not mind.’

Preacher had taken up the lamp and was standing at the top of the stairs looking back at the old man on the bed. He held the lamp high above him.

Preacher went to go down, but he paused with the half of him showing from the floor and called back again.

‘You will smoke and fry, Daddy Pugh, and the oil will run out of you. For fat you are with lazy living. And,’ his voice rose in venom, ‘they will burn you with Bessy Oak, ay, they’ll kindle the fire with her.’

With a whine of impotent rage the old man clutched at the bedclothes. Preacher turned away, having seen his last thrust go home. Daddy’s eyes swung wildly round: he snatched up Bessy Oak and flung it at Preacher, hitting him on the back of the head.

Preacher fell neck and crop down the last of the stairs. There came a fearful scream from him. The oil from the lamp had set his cloak alight, and all of him was alight.

People from Pentry thought it was a wild star. Preacher Elias burned on the open mountain-side. Daddy Pugh watched him like an excited child from the window where he had dragged himself.

That night Bron gave him two kippers for his tea and he spent the night re-polishing Bessy Oak.

Next Tuesday he went down to Morgans himself. It was the first day of Spring.

But Daddy Pugh did not become a hundred. He died two days before his birthday.

There has never been a man a hundred years of age in Pentry. Some people say Daddy Pugh was best: some say Preacher Elias, if he had died natural.

Most people now think it is Bron's turn. She looks better than her father did at the same age. And besides, she has married again.

Anne Ridler
DEAD AND GONE

I

'O that it were possible we might
But hold some two dayes conference with the dead'
Duchess of Malfi, IV, ii

The coffin's typical shape
Implies for each a dear particular form:
The glory that was loved, caressed, endured,
Is carrion now, concealment but betrays it;
Hidden but known, lifeless but still the precious being.
Therefore, though each in pain is wholly alone,
The coffin is a common guilty secret,
Making of each an unwilling schizophrenic:
For, what the imagination dares, the heart
Refuses; what the eye perceives, the heart
Knows to be falsehood; what the heart cries out
Receives an absolute negative from reason.

Then were all the other meetings traitors?
All those journeys when we flew and shone
Because toward each other, went toward this?
The perpetual hope, the hidden part of symbols,
Meant simply this: a sudden, public, death?
The dead could tell, but shares our longings no longer;
For once unfriendly, knows the whole or nothing
And shares nothing. Yet we cannot part.
Till we confront his life with this his death
And make one sense of both, all thought's uncertain
All memory unsolved, and our condition
Changes from apathy to agony, either
Equally profitless.

II

'In heaven there is neither marrying
nor giving in marriage'

The specialty of time and place
Were of love's making, and are gone;
From the unfocused blur of space
And the indifference of time
Struck by the force of joy or pain –
These will never come again.

True, the environment retains
A faithful passion: earth or stone,
Archway, tree or moving-stair –
The place cries out, cries out in pain:
Its cries are heard by you alone,
The moment will not come again.

So place is widowed. What remains?
Sayings and anniversaries,
Saints'-days that loss discovers,
Hagiography of lovers;
Worst, the gradual death of pain,
For the image will not come again.

And after such a loss, what gain?
Not the longed-for, that is certain.
Nothing, or else a new thing.
If there is any final meeting
It is past desire or pain.
If love is, love is to be born again.

III

'He is dead and gone, Lady'

But O these dead, in dreams, in dreams returning.
So nearly true, they make awaking grief,
So far from true, that the true pain is relief.

Cruel, fickle, dissatisfied, sad,
Their life-like, life-betraying forms
Disquiet the night, disquiet the grave.
For it is we who haunt the dead
And not the dead haunt us – even
We tempt them, if their love constrains them
Still to will what we desire.

In dreams, in dreams returning. So we pursue them
With phantoms from a common past
Unexorcized. But lay these ghosts at last.
Why should Felicity long for us? Why should we wish it?
What begins on earth, on earth must close.
If death is double-faced, and turns
An opening look towards another world
That's out of sight. For present acquaintance, this:
The lids closed with cold coins,
The lips ajar, not for love
(This is neither enemy nor friend),
And yet for love to recognize the end.

Tom Hopkinson

THE MATELOT AND THE PIECE OF CAKE

The darkness of the station was alive with men, but the sound that came out of them was small. Only an occasional spurting-up of matches and the breath-drawn glow of cigarettes showed that the forms slumped on benches, backed against walls, or reposing on their packs and kit-bags, had not passed out altogether – as many of them felt they had – while waiting for the train to draw in. There was no ill-humour, no complaint, only boredom boundless as the desert from which many of them had come. In one of the dim pools of half-light from a blacked-out lamp a group of men in kilts struggled to read a form of some kind, telling them where they were to go or what they were to do. Beside them in their spotlight appeared for a moment two circles in dark cloth – the bottom of a fat woman-porter pushing a hand-trolley. One of the kilted men let fall his hand in a cheerful slap, giving at the same time a tired imitation of a goatish skip. The woman said nothing. She did not even turn her head. The two circles and the squeaking trolley disappeared into the dark.

A young airman, known to his mates as Slim, was going home on leave. He leaned, indistinguishable from all the other figures, against an iron pillar from which the remains of paint had long since flaked. Yet not entirely indistinguishable, for the mere fact of his leaning showed that, even after two years' service, he had not absorbed the soldier's basic creed – never move if you can stand still, never stand if you can sit, never sit if you can lie. An occasional restless stirring disclosed something more, that underneath the blankness of uniform he retained the habit of the man who has once been

educated, the habit of thinking when alone, shown in a quiet pacing to and fro. Slim knew better, however, than to do any pacing to and fro on this platform.

The young airman's leave was to be spent with his mother and, though he was fond enough of her and had nowhere else in the world to spend it, he looked forward with little elation to the prospect. In his mother's eyes the war consisted of a series of acts of personal hostility inflicted by the rest of mankind on herself. There were only two combatants, herself and 'they.' 'I can't think why they want me to get another ration-book. You'd think they had something better to do.' 'They've dropped some bombs on the place where Daddy and I used to stay at Felixstowe.' 'They hammered on my door at nearly midnight - making out there was a light in one of the bedroom windows.' His mother's war seemed so different from Slim's own that he wished they could just forget about them both.

A bemused stir and whisper, a wave of figures stumbling forward. Silent as in a dream, proceeding out of nowhere, a train had come into existence at the platform. Seizing his kit-bag by its throat, Slim surged with the wave up to the carriage-doors. At the last moment, knowing what he would find inside, he hung back against the tide of figures, drawing his last gulp of clear air till to-morrow morning.

Lights in the corridor were few and blue, serving only to reveal one thing, the train he'd boarded was a train of corpses, Styx-bound Special. They lay at every angle, backs against doors, legs wide apart, heads forward drooped: at length along the corridor, side-to-side like ecstatically-married couples: fast asleep upright with their jaws open. Pushing his way on to find a gap, Slim put his foot down on a naked hand. It twitched, but nothing more. Further and further he threaded till a door blocked his way and progress ended. Behind him down the train, on which for some reason scarcely any doors would open, a file of men was slowly struggling to a standstill.

The train in its own time began to move, and Slim leaned

against the door, expecting to lean all night and quite content to do so. The snores and grunts of the men nearest mixed with the shudderings of the train, as he gave himself up altogether to the sounds and movements he could not control. He had been leaning against the door for perhaps half an hour when he felt a stirring on the other side. Cautiously it opened and a face appeared, a sailor's face, singularly clear-cut, bold and healthy like the faces on posters urging you to join the Navy: 'There's two judies in here, mate,' it said.

Slim stared for a moment, utterly bewildered. He fancied he was being appealed to for advice or help. 'O.K. mate,' he said at last. 'O.K.' 'Come on in, chum,' the sailor urged. Then, seeing Slim still motionless: 'Wake your ideas up, chum,' he whispered. 'I've knocked off a sleeping carriage. Flogged the merchant in charge some brandy for it. "Keep quiet," he says, "an' remember I don't know nothing ..."' Flick it all, chum,' he went on impatiently, 'if you don't want the chance there's lots as do. Here, let me signal one of these dead bodies.'

The airman stepped inside. Softly the sailor closed the door. In the stronger light of the sleeping-car corridor his face had a quality of revelation; it looked simple and fresh like something newly-born. He wore nothing but vest and trousers, and the gold hairs on his muscular arms glittered. In that train of drowsy stench, he positively smelt of health.

'A matelot, mate,' he said. 'A matelot home from the Med. Next stop St. Bleeding Pancras or King's Ruddy Cross. I picked the judies up in Aberdeen - munition-girls, they say, coming to a factory down South. Not floosies, chum. Real girls.' He slid back the compartment door.

'This is Sally, chum. That's Jill.'

'Gillian my name is,' said a dark girl, whom Slim saw at a glance would be his responsibility.

'Mine's Slim,' he answered, getting out his cigarettes. There had been so many introductions of this kind in the past two years, he sometimes fancied he was going round

the girls of Britain on an endless chain, exchanging names and cigarettes, and that he would be coming back soon to where he started. The dark girl took the cigarette, lit it, and let out her breath: 'Here's happy landings, Slim,' she said.

There were four bunks in the compartment. They sat on the lower ones along each side. In the middle of the ceiling was a metal fitting for three bulbs, only one of which was in its place, not so much giving off as containing light, a bottled orange glow-worm. As the sailor stood up to get something from his kit-bag, Slim saw for the first time the girl Sally who was sitting opposite, and almost whistled at the sight. A glimmer from the bulb shone on her face, which seemed to be suspended about twelve inches from his own. The girl was almost beautiful. She was pale, but it looked like the pallor of perfect health; her skin was smooth and tight-drawn as a fruit. She had wide dark eyes whose colour he couldn't properly see, and a mass of hair which - when she bent towards him and the light caught its edges - reminded Slim of the well-kept mahogany at home. But the astonishing thing about her, the quality which you'd think must have kept the munition factory idle at their lathes, was an air of confident enjoyment and expectancy. She looked as if she expected everything to be fun, always, but particularly for the next half-hour.

At a glance Slim understood without necessity of thought the relationship binding the two girls. The mousy face of Gillian, which had seemed to him first dull, then positively irritating in comparison with Sally, now loomed pathetic. The face of a hopeless follower, always wiser than her leader and never able to influence her actions in the least degree.

However, the words that came out of Sally's soft mouth were commonplace enough: 'Look sharp, Jack, with that drink! Are you boozing up there all on your own?'

The sailor sprang down. He held a bottle from which he had just screwed out the cork. He offered it to Sally, who handed it across to Slim: 'Vistors first in this family,' she said. Slim was surprised to find himself grasping a bottle

of excellent cognac. No wonder the attendant opened up. He'd get seven quid for one of these when he reached town.

'That's the stuff, Jack,' he said, knowing better than to ask how it was come by. But the sailor answered his unspoken question. 'Swiped it off a Jerry in the Med.'

'Then you're about the only one that has had something off the Jerries. Till now it's mostly been the other way.'

'Lord, Sailor, I bet you've seen a few things,' declared Sally warmly. 'Tell us all about it. We never hear nothing in this country.'

'I've seen a few things would turn your stomach, my beauty.'

'Maybe it doesn't turn as easy as you'd think.'

The sailor leaned over and placed his hand firmly underneath her breast. 'It'll turn all right, my girl.' He sat back. 'I've seen something not many men have seen,' he said. 'Jerries screaming their bloody heads off – and they'd got cause for screaming too. Off Crete, that was. There was a heap of Jerries landed from the air, and the rest were coming in on these Greek fishing-boats, big boats with a few hundred men in each – ky-eeks they call 'em. They'd got no escort when we ran across 'em, three or four destroyers among all those bloody fishing-boats. We didn't fire because we didn't want no noise or flashes, see, didn't want to be spotted by the Jerry aircraft. So we just went nosing up to the ky-eeks, quiet as you please, and pushed 'em over.' He demonstrated with his hands. 'Course they'd got no life-belts or any of that caper, they'd just been packed in and ferried over for the landing. As the ky-eek tipped, the Jerries'd go running up the side like rats – half of 'em still wearing their tin helmets and big boots. Talk about scream! Next minute the sea was all full of heads like corks, and when you looked again there'd only be a handful of 'em left. Well, we'd done that half a dozen or six times, and were just getting the feel of it, when our own bleedin' turn came.'

'How was that?' Slim asked, handing Jack the bottle. The girls seemed too intent to speak.

'Walked right over a bloody mine,' said the sailor, wiping his mouth. 'Sea was plastered with 'em. We knew we'd cop it before long, but we were hoping to push all the Jerries over first. Blew the bloody bows right off her. Me and my mate are standing up for'ard, and suddenly there's a hell of a noise – not sudden like a bang, more like a kind of earthquake under water. Then the whole sea goes up over our heads. I could see the bows bend right back towards us like the front of a kid's toy, and when the sea fell back they just broke off and went down with it. Straight down, like that,' and he dived his hand down towards the floor.

'And so,' said Slim, not knowing why he said it, 'your mate went down along with it.'

'True enough, chum. He was a yard or two for'ard of me, and the sea just cleaned him off, like a fly caught by a bloody hose-pipe. Best bloody mine I ever heard of. I reckon the Jerries must have planned it special.'

'Could she float without the bows?' asked Gillian.

'No, sweetheart. She couldn't, and we knew it. We all just chucked ourselves into the drink and took a chance on it. Inside three minutes she was gone.'

'What happened to you all?'

'A few of us got ashore, one way and another. We were only a few miles out. I swam to a spar – it was a piece of a ky-eek we'd pushed over and there was a German on it. I made signs to him to let me come up there beside him. He was a little chap and he hadn't any gun on him. Anyway he could see I was a matelot and must have thought he stood a better chance of making land with me aboard. We did make land, too, at least I did, drifted in after a few hours, and when we got a hundred yards or so off shore I told him to flick off. 'Hop it, son,' I said, 'I don't want no bleedin' prisoners on my hands.'"

'So what did he do?' Slim asked with an effort.

'Hopped it,' the sailor answered briefly, and then, as if hazily aware that something should be added, 'I wouldn't put it past him to have made shore either. Most of those

Jerries could swim a bit. There was another Jerry on the spar, a dead one, and I wanted to see what he had on him.'

'What did he have, Jack?' asked Sally.

'Two bottles of the best,' the sailor answered. 'Must have come straight down to the Med. from France. That's what you're drinking now, my beautiful.'

Sally made a slight grimace. Slim looked at Gillian. 'It doesn't taste any worse, does it?' he asked. She smiled. 'Haven't *you* got any tales to tell?' she asked. 'Haven't you shot anyone down in flames, or bombed somebody's headquarters?'

The tone of her voice and the words she chose gave Slim a momentary shock – as if the girl were exchanging with him a secret signal, the invisible badge of recognition flashed by all who look speculatively at the world, and have learned in the tumble of life to keep speculation veiled. Was there irony in this mouse? Did it possess the power of abstract thought? But Gillian's look was as dim and her eye as vague as ever. She looked like the last girl to be asked to dance at the Works Party.

'Wandering about over the North Sea,' Slim answered. 'That's all I ever do. Sitting on my tail in the back-end of a metal tube. Don't even see where we're going, only where we were just now – and anyway all sea looks alike. Fire the guns off once in three days just to have something to report. Most times it's a sea-gull, or a piece of floating wood. Once the piece of wood had something on it. I didn't shoot that time, Jack,' he couldn't help saying. 'But there wasn't any need. The job had been done for me – by one side or other.'

'Sub. hunting?' asked the sailor. 'Flicking dull game that must be. Ever get one?'

'Not a real one.'

Sally's big eyes looked wider than ever. 'Men have all the fun,' she said.

As if suddenly recalled to duty, the sailor sprang up and corked the bottle. 'Men aren't going to have all the fun

to-night,' he said. 'Hop along up there, my lovely. Jack'll be with you by the time you've said your prayers. We'll go to bed upstairs, eh chum? And leave the downstairs floor to you. Don't forget to put the bleedin' cat out.' He reached up, unscrewed the last bulb from the fitting, and let it fall on the floor to break with a sharp pop. 'Look out up there, honey, the fleet's in,' and he swung himself into the top bunk beside her.

In the darkness Slim reached out a hand to Gillian. It met nothing. He reached on and on, and found she was already lying down. Pulling off his tunic, he lay down beside her. An immense weariness came over him the minute he was no longer sitting up. He struggled desperately to keep awake. From the bunk above came a laugh, a sound like a protest, then a determined scuffle and a cry 'Oh Christ!' The girl beside Slim lay quite still. She didn't speak. She made no sign. He put his lips against her cheek, and there was no response. What did it mean? Was she waiting for him to begin, or was he going to be let off - what did it mean when a woman was completely passive? Was she anxious to be left alone, or challenging your manhood? He laid his head for a moment on her shoulder while he thought things out, and still pondering this female problem, fell - like a stone down a well - asleep.

Several times in the night Slim was woken up by activity overhead, by scuffles, whisperings, and at least once by tears. But the tears seemed to end, and sleep had begun again before he could puzzle out whether they were serious or not. The girl Gillian lay completely still the whole night long - whether asleep, lost in her own thoughts, or wishing to afford a quiet pillow, he had no idea.

Then suddenly, in what he supposed was still the middle of the night, a hand let up a blind, and it was day. The two up above were stirring and, after a while, the sailor lowered himself down. 'Not long now, chum,' he said. 'Christ, what a night that was!'

Slim looked awkwardly at Gillian. She was sitting up and

tidying her mousy hair. Her oval, rather heavy, face gave not the least sign of any feeling, but he could feel she was listening for his reply. 'It certainly was, chum!' Slim declared. Gillian looked up at him. Her face was as expressionless as ever, yet he felt she was grateful for the lie.

The sailor drew the blinds and folded up the blankets. Everything he did was neat, dexterous and thorough. He brushed the broken glass of the bulb beneath the seat, opened the ventilators and let down the window. Then he began to comb his hair.

As he was doing this the girl Sally, who had tidied herself in the bunk above, let her feet down to the floor. She went over to the window, and looked out at the country rushing past. It was still early morning, misty, the sun not risen, a glow of brightness foretelling a fine day. Looking back into the compartment again, her eyes fell on the sailor, combing his hair after putting on his clothes. She stepped across, seized his face in her two hands, and began to kiss him passionately on mouth and eyes: 'Oh God, I love you, Jack,' she said.

'Here, what's that in aid of, sister?' He put her firmly, but not roughly, to one side. 'Can't you see I'm just getting myself straight?'

'What do we *do*, Jack? Where do we go?'

The sailor looked bewildered, and the girl Gillian stepped in to the rescue. 'We'll have to go to Woolwich first, Sally,' she said. 'We've got to get fixed up with some rooms.'

'All right,' Sally agreed. 'But after that. Where do we meet, sailor? How do I find you? I don't even know your name.' She spoke as if she were mentioning a deep mystery, as though it were both wonderful and fated that she should not even know his name.

The sailor made what appeared to Slim a visible effort at connected thought. 'William Green's my name, sister,' he said, and the words brought to Slim's mind a perfectly clear picture - of that mate who had gone down with the ship's bows. 'I live at Stepney with my mother and dad, 27,

Aldenham Road. It's a greengrocer's. I'll have to leave you when we get to town because my brother's family'll be here to meet me – he's down in the Med. too. But I'll be coming up to-morrow morning, and I'll see you then.'

'We'll be at work to-morrow morning,' Gillian objected.

Sally waved it away as nothing. 'Where do we meet, Jack?' she asked. 'I can't call you William yet.'

'Under the clock at Victoria, sweetheart. I'll be there. Eleven sharp. Don't keep me waiting.'

They said good-bye, and the two men moved out into the corridor. Once there, the sailor worked his way rapidly along, until, as the train pulled ponderously into the terminus, they were almost in the front carriage of all. The sailor leaned out of the window. Suddenly he began to shout: 'Oh God Almighty, chum. They've made it. Just look at 'em, they're here – the wife and kids!'

Slim struggled to keep silent, but his tongue would not agree. 'What about ...? ... I mean ... Shall you be going ...?'

For a second the sailor turned an excited face back into the train. 'Christ, chum, *what* a piece of cake!' was all he said. Then 'Oh God, it's the wife and little nippers!' and he leaped easily down on to the platform.

Denton Welch
TWO POEMS

I

CONDEMNATION IN THE
CASTLE GARDENS

Bah, Bah, Blister Sheep,
All the pigeons in the Keep,
All their eggs between the cracks,
All the office girls in slacks,
All the daisies on the lawn,
All the duckweed and the spawn
Floating on the concrete pool,
Tell me I'm a bloody fool.
All the children on the swings
Shout the message till it rings.
"Bahing, Bahing Bladder Sheep
The animal-doctor should put you to sleep!"

II

GREEDY-GUTS

One thing only then is waiting
For the pigeon in its mating,
For the beggar on the highway,
For the fame that's coming my way,
For the impudence that sings
Till the Gospel Chapel rings.
Death is dangling his bait
And Greedy-Guts can hardly wait.

Vitaliano Brancati

SEBASTIANA

(Translated from the Italian by Eric Mosbacher)

A narrow track, littered with rocks like the bed of a mountain stream, winds its way between huge boulders up a mountain above Taormina. At the top there clings a village named Castelmola. It consists of about a hundred cottages, huddled on top of one another. The front doors are just about high enough to admit a donkey, and the bottom of the door of one cottage immediately overhangs the top of the neighbour's window. Two palings of one little balcony actually rest on the doorstep of the cottage next door.

The village streets wind round the recently rebuilt church, to which they seem to be trying to cling to avoid sliding down the mountainside. They are short and narrow, and after two or three sharp twists and turns stop short in front of a vista of dazzling sky, or sea raised a thousand cubits over a thin line of beach, or an endless, precipitous cascade of gardens, from which there comes no smell, because the village is everlastingly muffled in a subdued smell of manure, which no wind seems capable of blowing away. Every quarter of an hour an immense clock unburdens itself noisily of its weight of time, and a big bell, swinging slowly through the sunlit days, throws its own shadow from the church tower and causes random objects on shelves and tables to vibrate.

In this village there lived a girl who grew up and reached her twentieth year. When evening came and the moon was in the sky she would sit quietly and dream about the future, gazing at the gleaming stones and the vast, opaque sea and the shadows cast by the twisted roofs.

Her name was Sebastiana. She was quiet and humble, like a country housemaid, and quick to blush and tremble.

Though she was as pure as drinking water, she was always bashful and ashamed, without knowing why; though she was charmingly pretty, she was as diffident as though she suffered from some deformity; and she was so terrified of looking in a mirror that her sisters, if they wanted her to look at herself, had to drag her in front of it like a reluctant sheep and force her to open her frightened eyes.

'Please leave me alone,' Sebastiana used to say. 'I only want to be left alone. Do I do anybody any harm? Please leave me alone. If you want to go away, go away. If you want to leave Castelmola, leave Castelmola, but please leave me alone!'

So her sisters and her mother and father left her alone.

Sebastiana was capable of remaining seated in a little room for hour after hour, seeming to impart to everything about her, the lifeless objects that encumbered the table and sideboard and the living things that appeared on the ceiling and the floor, her own sincerity, humility, love, dedication, hope, forgiveness. Happy in the stillness, rejoicing at remaining still, delighted at being forgotten and neglected, Sebastiana went on living like this until September 9th, 1939, when she went down with a fever. Before sunset she was dead.

She was buried in the little cemetery of Castelmola. Did I not mention that this cemetery clings precariously to a projecting part of the mountain, and that the graves look as though they are straining to prevent themselves from plunging into the abyss? It was only after she was transported to this place that Sebastiana's misfortunes began - if events that happened to a wretched body, so soon abandoned by the soul within, which had made it shine with purity and modesty, can be described as misfortunes.

One windy day there was a landslide, and Sebastiana hurtled down the slope, first inside her walnut coffin, but then without it. Her shroud had been consumed in the damp darkness; and she ended up in the public square of Taormina. The first passer-by, an old man from Genoa, finding

himself suddenly confronted with the body, brazenly stretched out on the pavement in the middle of the deserted square, of this girl who had been dead for many months, nearly fainted with fright.

Sebastiana was reburied in the cemetery of Taormina, near a pathway which, though not noisy, was nevertheless not very quiet. Lovers, sweethearts, soldiers, officers, ladies from the Red Cross, walked past at night, talking, kissing or singing songs. As the months passed a particularly caressing and intense note crept into these night-time noises, perhaps because of the thick darkness into which earth and sea were plunged after the outbreak of war. Occasionally loud crashes and shouts and cries alternated with these sounds, and in the end drove them away altogether. The war came nearer and nearer, until one day an exploding shell tore Sebastiana out of the earth and flung her down on the beach at Giardini, not far from the station.

This was in 1943, the year in which the Germans were withdrawing from Sicily, dreaming ugly dreams in the lonely cottages in which they flung themselves down to sleep beside their machine-guns and field-glasses. A tall, taciturn Bavarian officer, who was three-quarters mad and one-quarter exhausted by the effort of concealing his madness, thought that he recognized in Sebastiana the face of his fiancée, who lay dead under the ruins of a big building in Germany. The madness which he was holding down inside him now reached a climax, and the remnant of intelligence with which he was trying to stifle it rose to a pitch bordering on genius. He managed to put Sebastiana's body in an ammunition box, cover it with a black flag and put it in a gun-carriage. Thus equipped, the Bavarian officer continued his retreat. The detachment of which he was in command brought up the rear-guard of the Germans withdrawing along the national highway, and the whole fury of the armies advancing behind them seemed to be concentrated on the gun-carriage. An infernal din accompanied Sebastiana's bier on its northward journey. The straits, which it crossed at night, were littered

CAVALCANTI



Private Collection
The Woman with the Drums



Private Collection
The Window on the Port



CHRISTMAS IN THE MARKET PLACE

Written by Henri Ghéon, adapted by Eric Crozier and presented
by Morley College Theatre School



CHRISTMAS IN THE MARKET PLACE

Production by Rupert Doone, Scenes and Costumes by Robert
Medley, Music directed by R. Wood

SVEN BERLIN



Boy with a Lobster (1946)

WILHELMINA BARNES-GRAHAM



Rock Landscape, Cornwall (1949)



St. Ives (1949)

JOHN WELLS



Nocturne (1946-47)

PETER LANYON



Generation

BERNARD LEACH



Stoneware Tile

DAVID HAUGHTON



Zennor

with wreckage and decaying corpses, and every now and then flashed as brightly as a drawing-room as it received into its bosom an aeroplane blazing like a torch. The German, black and silent, sat crouched over his box like a dog on its master's grave, facing the stern, with his back turned to a mainland pregnant with new disasters and his eyes glued on Sicily, which was lit up by a glow as mysterious and incomprehensible to him as was the victory over him of these men who were so much less warlike than he; and as he advanced thus over the waters the remnant of intelligence with which he fought and concealed his madness slowly gave way to it. By the time he reached land he was completely mad. He picked up the box with the black flag, climbed shrieking on to a little eminence near the sea-edge and dropped the poor girl from Castelmola on to the deck of a barge which was just leaving for Trieste.

The barge, bearing no arms or flag, sailed up the Adriatic, but just outside Bari it was set fire to, smashed and sunk, and the box, with Sebastiana inside it, propelled by a shipwrecked man who used it as a life-saving apparatus, eventually reached harbour, where it was loaded on to a convoy and transported, without a flag this time, but labelled 'dynamite', into the heart of Germany.

In May, 1944, the box reached a concentration camp in Poland. Inevitably the place became a battlefield. It changed hands several times. From the Germans it passed to the Russians, from the Russians to the Germans, and finally from the Germans to the Russians again. At the end of July the dead girl was still being pursued by the whine and detonation of shells. During her life-time Sebastiana had fled from the world, concealing herself in the cottage at Castelmola. But the savage world, having her corpse in its clutches, seemed as though now it would never tire of rolling and bumping her about; it seemed as though it were trying to stun her with noise, howling with rage into an ear made serene for ever by a heaven-sent deafness.

Umberto Saba

TWO POEMS

(Translated from the Italian by John Cairncross)

I

ENTELLO

For her a lady far off now and for a godlike
boy who is listening to me
I have written, I an old man,
these poems. I remember,
as in me joyful I relive them, a wrestler
of old. Entello was the name he bore. He conquered
fighting the last time Fortune at the games of
Aeneas, held along the kindly
beaches of the Sicilian shores, the host Ancestes.
Whitening there chased each other on the waters
ripples that in the open sea would have been Sirens.
His was a heart of mettle and his, too, was wisdom.
'Here,' said he, 'laurels and here art I abandon.'

II

THE RAPE OF GANYMEDE

It was a day like other days. It was serene on
Ida; the goats in peace on the hills were browsing,
given into the keeping of a youthful herdsman.
Only the dog roamed hither and thither, uneasy.

On the face of the boy shadows were passing.
Perhaps all too severe the king his father,
Perhaps he longed for his companions –

on Ida

many there were of the same age as he,

who, all, of the same rivalries were lovers,
and, for the kiss of a garland, violently
fought, to a chorus of loud cries, each other –
White in the heavens cloud upon cloud raced by.

Always the dog kept prowling, scenting danger,
and the flock, more compact, huddled closer together.
To the omens insensitive, the herdsman,
forgetful of his duties, still was dreaming.

Thundering down from heaven a dusky eagle
sent the herd scattering, set the dog barking
wildly.

Now from the blue the boy's radiance
suffused once more the earth for the last time.

J. C. Hall

TWO POEMS

—

I

DEATH IN THE MOUNTAINS

As over the sweet-scented hills I came
I met an alien smell, corrupt and sour,
And thought: Is Death here too, arrogant power?
The very air seemed vivid with that name.

At last within a pen of rough-hewn stone
I found what so offended earth and heaven:
A sheep, ravaged by some wild beast, or even
Killed by the heat perhaps when weak and prone.

And yet — who knows, so desolate-wild that place? —
Perhaps some older rite had been fulfilled:
The mountain darkened, suddenly chilled,
As though a cloudy hand had crossed its face,

And all the sheep stood round in simple fear,
The valleys shook with thunder far and wide.
The lightning struck; another victim died.
Godlike the sun rode down the hemisphere.

A myth? Perhaps. A legend grown too old
For our retelling, waste of poetic breath.
And yet, O Inscrutable Mystery, O Death,
How should I speak, how else could the tale be told?

II

SUICIDES

Reading the evening papers we meet them,
Those anonymous names:
She who turned the gas on her sorrow,
He whom the Thames
Left one night more derelict on its shore
Than a child at the convent door.

Little we knew them, these who in their lives
Commanded no column.
And even now only between the lines
May we glimpse the solemn
Dilemmas that drove them thither and guess
Something of their last loneliness.

What of this girl? Surely her beauty might
Have confounded the shades?
Or was it beauty itself that led her
Into the glades
Of darkness where, by love's fever oppressed,
She sought to be dispossessed?

And what of him they found in the chilly dawn
With the tide in his hair?
They say in drowning a man unravels all
His history there
In a fleeting moment before he falls away
On eternal silence. So he may

Have found at last in some long-sought, half-forgotten
Memory a mirror
Reflecting his first true self, distorted since
By childhood terror.
Oh then perhaps – the pattern revealed – too late
He saw his meaningless fate ...

We cannot know; for even the notes they left
In their desolate rooms
Can tell us little but that our restless souls
To unknown dooms
Move on – while still, deep in each human face,
We seek the signature of grace.

Tragic their deaths, more tragic the aching thought
That had we been there
We might have laid our hands on their hands and cried
'Do not despair!
For here, even here in this living touch, this breath,
May be the secret you seek in death.'

Hal Summers

DARK BROTHER

In the public street a little while I go
In hubbub, a garland of gins, a battle of roses,
Then over my hidden path the branches flow,
Over my secret shell the water closes.

Figures in column, words, sunlight and sense,
Action, amazement, – then that reel is gone
And under the great night I breathe my trance;
No pilot at the controls, the plane flies on.

Dark brother, preserver, who have watched and guarded
In the everyday decease of conscious me,
Then, when I come again, go unrewarded,
Waking my slave, asleep my sovereignty

One day we will reign together and make flower
The ground at our coming, or the air if we fly
Burn with strange lights; in a day also, in an hour
We will abdicate together, and then good-bye.

THE CRITICAL VIEW

★

Robert Liddell

THE POETRY OF ANGELOS SIKELIANOS

Angelos Sikelianos first appeared as an important poet in 1907, with his first poem *Alafroiskiotos*, 'the visionary.' For years his work has been privately printed, circulated in small, uncommercial editions, hard to obtain and comparatively little known or appreciated. Nevertheless it has been known to those most concerned with Modern Greek literature, and it has been valued by them not as a private discovery or as the special preserve of a coterie – they have seen it as the work of a major poet. It was no cause for surprise to them that he should ascend the intellectual throne of Greece, left vacant in Palamas' old age; but the poems that have most truly made him a national poet, the poetry of the war in which perhaps its greatest suffering found expression, surprised as any tragic and original work must surprise.

Sikelianos was born in 1884 in Leucas, that island off the coast of Acarnania from whose cliffs Sappho is said to have leapt. To his island youth he owed a love of Greek landscape greater than that of any other Greek poet – he was also impressed (it is hard to say this as respectfully as one would wish) by his own Apollo-like physical beauty. It is necessary to add that biographical records and early photographs show this to have been very great. And in Leucas – which is the neighbour of Ithaca, and which may even have been the

Ithaca of Odysseus – the mythological past was opened to him in a dramatic way: he saw the grave of a Homeric warrior being uncovered, and even saw the face, perfectly preserved, which almost instantaneously crumbled into dust after its exposure to the air.

Sikelianos went to Athens to study law, a common beginning to the literary life in Greece. But thereafter his life was very different from that of most other Greek intellectuals, and in particular from that of his great predecessor Palamas, who never left Greece, and rarely left his study in Athens. Sikelianos travelled; it was in the Libyan desert that he began to write *Alafroiskiotos*. He visited France and America – his first wife was the daughter of an American sociologist. And he knew intimately the islands and mountains of Greece, that country so unknown to many Athenians who are quite at home in Paris or London.

He and his wife were the inspiration behind the Delphic festivals of 1927 and 1930 – those magnificent performances of the *Prometheus* and the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus in the ancient theatre of Delphi, and of Pyrrhic dances in the stadium. M. Octave Merlier,* who had the good fortune to be present, has written of the sublimity of the occasion. The gigantic rocks above the Castalian spring, the Phaedriades, echoed the voice of the crucified demi-god, and the eagles of Parnassus hovered over his head. Those who were less fortunate can judge from photographs the extreme beauty of these performances, in which careful scholarship and exquisite taste were inspired by such a living love for Aeschylus and for Delphi that they were totally free from the cold antiquarianism that has characterized some other classical revivals.

For Sikelianos these festivals were, like those of the ancient Greek world, religious festivals – from this arose their peculiar and unique beauty. Not unnaturally they were a financial failure. Delphi is not very easily accessible; and of those who went there, not all were willing or able to make

* Octave Merlier: *Le Serment sur le Styx* (Athens, 1946).

the necessary suspension of disbelief in the gods of Olympus – though this is never a difficult act of faith to make in Greece. Sikelianos had hoped for the continuation of the festivals and that Delphi, once a panhellenic centre, might become an international centre of peace and the arts, round Apollo's shrine and the fabled navel of the earth.

Sikelianos has been compared with Yeats. Yeats is a poet who can be admired by the English reader, and who probably should be presented to the admiration of the foreign reader, without much examination of his debt to hermetic philosophy. Similarly, in an elementary study of Sikelianos, it may be allowable to present a selection from that part of his work whose appeal is most direct – it may not be improper to omit any very close examination of the way in which he tries to achieve a harmony of the 'two Ancient Testaments', that of Hebraism and that of Hellenism. It is perhaps enough to say that it is a more sympathetic harmony than that of Milton; it is more attractive a notion of Dionysos or Demeter to regard them as 'types' or prophecies of Christ and the Virgin, than to place them in Pandemonium. We need not criticize the logic or the orthodoxy of Sikelianos' Christian Orphism. Such a poem as *The Sacred Way* speaks quite clearly for itself:

By the new wound that Fate had opened in me
I thought the setting sun entered my heart
With such force, as when a wave
Enters a slowly sinking ship
By a sudden crack.

For that afternoon,
Like a man long sick, who first goes out
To suck life from the outer world, I was
Walking solitary along the road
That runs from Athens, having as its goal
The sanctuary of Eleusis.
And this road always was for me
Like the path of the soul ...

It seemed like a great river, bearing
Slow wagons drawn by oxen,
Laden with logs or corn-sheaves, and other
Carts that went quickly by me
With men like shadows in them ...

But beyond, as if the world of men were gone
And only Nature left, hour after hour
Peace reigned. And the rock
That I met, rooted at the road's edge,
Seemed a throne destined for me
Throughout all ages. And I clasped my hands
On my knees as I sat, forgetting
If I had set out that same day, or if it was
In past ages I had taken that same road.
But suddenly in that peace, at the next turning
Appeared three shadows.
A Gipsy came towards me,
And after him there followed, drawn by chains,
Two slow-footed bears.
And soon, when they were in front of me,
And the Gipsy saw me, before I had the time
To look at him well, he took from his shoulder
The tambourine, and striking it with one hand,
With the other he pulled the chains with force.
Then the two bears stood up
Heavily upon their hind-legs ... one
(It must have been the mother), the big one,
With all her forehead decked with plaited strings
Of blue beads, and a white charm on top,
Rose suddenly in majesty, as if she were
A primeval wooden image
Of the Great Goddess, the Eternal Mother,
The very same who, in her sacred grief,
Through time has taken on a human form,
And, weeping for her daughter, she was called
Demeter here – and, weeping for her son,

Alcmena she was there, or was Our Lady.
And the little bear-cub beside her,
Like a big toy, like a simple little child,
Rose also obediently, not yet guessing
The length of his pain and the bitterness
Of slavery, which his mother reflected
In her two fiery eyes that stared at him!
But when, in her weariness,
She was slow to dance, the Gipsy
With a cunning tug at the chain
In the cub's nostril, bleeding
Still from the ring with which a few days back
It seems that they had pierced it, suddenly
Forced her to her feet, bellowing with pain,
Turning her head to her cub, and dancing fiercely.

And I, who watched, I passed
Out of time, far beyond time,
Free from the forms imprisoned
In time, in pictures and in images,
I was beyond, beyond time ...
But by me, raised to her feet by the force
Of the ring, and of her ill-fated love,
I saw nothing but the majestic bear
With the blue beads on her head,
Prodigious symbol of the martyrdom
Of all the world, past and present,
Prodigious symbol of the primal pain
Of which the mortal ages have not yet
Paid the soul's dues ... for she was still
And is in Hell.

And for a time
I kept my head bent,
As I threw into the tambourine, I also
Slave of this world, a drachma ...

But at last
When the Gipsy withdrew, dragging
After him the two slow-footed bears again,

And vanished in the twilight, then my heart
Roused me to take again the road that ends
At the ruins of the Sanctuary of the Soul,
At Eleusis.

And my heart, as I was walking, groaned:
'Will there ever come, will there come an hour
When the soul of the bear and of the Gipsy
And my soul, which I call initiated,
Keep feast together?'

And as I advanced,
And as night fell, I felt by that same wound
That Fate had opened in me, the darkness
Violently entering my heart, as when a wave
Enters a slowly sinking ship
By a sudden crack ... And yet as if my heart
Thirsted for such a tide to sink in,
To be drowned utterly in the darkness,
And as it went down utterly in the darkness
A murmur spread around me,
A murmur,

And it seemed to say:

'It will come ...'

The same synthesis of Our Lady and Demeter lies behind his earlier and longer poem *Mater Dei*, at the same time an elegy on the death of his sister, a hymn of resurrection, and a spring song; and this poem was in part inspired by the fact that the Greek Church keeps All Souls' Saturday just before Lent, and on Lenten Fridays sings the Salutations of Our Lady (the four parts of the great sixth-century Akathist Hymn): both are Spring festivals. This lovely poem – the most musical in Greek since the death of Solomos, the first and greatest lyric poet of Modern Greece – defies translation unless, like the able French version of M. Robert Levesque, it is offered as a key to a parallel text.

But Sikelianos also wrote poems on individual aspects of ancient or Christian Greece, without attempting a synthesis. The subjects that attracted him are more romantic than

those chosen by Cavafy – and, even when the subject is one that Cavafy would not have disdained, the turn given to it is very different from that which he might have given. Such a poem is the sonnet on the elderly, childless Spartan, who in accordance with the laws of Lycurgus, chooses out a young man to beget an heir for him upon his wife, and lays an ambush to take him by force. Such a poem is that inspired by an incident related of Phidias by Plutarch, that the sculptor commemorated a boy athlete by writing ‘Pantarcēs is fair’ on the foot of one of his statues. Cavafy might have made either subject into a Greek epigram – for what Sikelianos has made of them, we must go outside literature for an analogy, and compare them with low reliefs, or engraved jewels, or vase paintings.

Such a sonnet as *Our Lady of Sparta* might perhaps be compared with an ikon – it is certainly more than the choral and orchestral work a Greek composer has made of it. But perhaps in this poem the process of synthesis is secretly at work: the ikon is on the Byzantine hill of Mistra, but the ancient name Sparta brings with it memories of Helen, as well as the ordinary associations of the word ‘Spartan’ in modern speech:

Neither bronze pillar not Pentelic stone
Will I set Thy immortal picture on;
But on a column made of cypress wood,
World without end, my work shall so smell good! ...
And on the hill that wears for coronal
The fort of the Venetians, I shall raise Thee
A mighty church, and therein I shall place Thee,
Shut with an iron door, immovable!
Bells, that shall echo with the lance’s clang,
Or sword’s against the breastplate, I shall hang
There – little bells above, as on a rattle!
The church’s window panes, to give Thee shade,
Of deeply coloured crystal shall be made
– And every one a loophole on the battle!

On October, 28th 1940, Italy invaded Greece. A few days later Sikelianos gave a public reading of *The Sibyl*, a tragedy upon which he had been engaged during the summer of that year. He had decided to read it because of its relevance to the situation: had time allowed, one could have believed it written for the occasion. The tragedy had for its subject the visit of Nero to Greece, coming both as a tyrant and as a low comedian. The scene was laid at the sanctuary of Delphi. News was brought that Nero wished to be consecrated there as the reincarnation of Apollo. The Delphic sibyl led the people of Delphi in a heroic resistance, and they greeted the approach of the Roman soldiers with cries of 'Let them come!' Sikelianos had become the spokesman of Greece, and the great ancient poet, Aeschylus, whom he so much loved, was to be associated with him in that office. With great courage the Royal Theatre had begun rehearsing the *Persians*, and two days after the Greek victory at Korytsà Athens heard the messenger's speech describing the battle of Salamis, and the voice that rose from the Greek fleet telling the Greeks that they were fighting for their altars, their homes and their all. It was also a joy to Sikelianos to see the Great Mother, under the title of Our Lady of Tinos, venerated as the supreme general and the protector of the Greek forces. For him, as for so many Hellenes and Philhellenes, all Greece, Ancient, Byzantine and Modern, became mysteriously unified and more vividly living in those days of hope and exaltation. It was in the terrible years of occupation and famine that followed that Sikelianos was to attain his highest stature as a great and tragic prophet.

In the winter of 1941-2, the period of his country's greatest suffering, Sikelianos wrote the five poems to which, as a collection, he gave the name ACRITICA. Smuggled out of Greece, they circulated in Egypt in photostat reproductions. A copy also reached M. Octave Merlier, the director of the Institut Français of Athens, then deported from his post and held under surveillance at Aurillac - he translated these poems for limited circulation among his friends, and they

were the inspiration of those who were soon to be fighting in the *maquis* of the Auvergne.

Sikelianos had called his poems ACRITICA, and in every collection of Greek folk-poetry there will be found a section under this heading. They are poems inspired by the activities of Diyénis the Acrite, hero of the Byzantine epic which bears his name: the Acrites were the frontier guards of the Eastern Empire, who stood at the extreme limits of Christendom and civilization, and at this time Sikelianos could think of himself and of all his fellow-countrymen in that position.

There is a famous folk-song whose title might be translated as *Diyénis Agonistes*: in it the hero wrestles with Death:

‘Charon we’ll have a wrestling-bout on the bronze
threshing-floor.

And, Charon, if you conquer me, then you may
take my soul:

But, Charon, if I conquer you, then let the world
be glad!

They wrestled and they wrestled there – Charon
it was that conquered.’

To the Acrites of his own day Sikelianos swore, in *The Oath by the Styx*:

But now I shall not leave you any more,
Not for one instant do I seek to leave you,
For I have made my heart,
For you to dance, my lads, a threshing-floor.
My eyelids closed, I see you here before me
Enter the mysterious dancing-place of death,
One after another, and holding hands.
And with eyes closed I look at you,
I never have enough, I never have enough of watching
you,

Immortal warriors, my brothers,
Ceaselessly dancing the Syrtos and the Kleftic dance
Upon my heart.

And these lines from *Dionysos in the Crib* are part of his Acrite's hymn, a psalm before sun-rise, *Deus, Deus meus, ad te de luce vigilo* addressed to Christ and Dionysos on the cruel Christmas Eve of 1941. It is dated 'the Agrypnia of Christmas': the word means the watchnight service of the Greek Church.

Sweet child, my Dionysos and my Christ:
Young Titan come into the world to-day,
You have no mother's arms to warm you ...
You are the son of this encircling night,
Of this night, and of our unsleeping heart
That, spark of light amid this frozen chaos,
Wrestles this evening with death itself,
Our own death, and the world's death!

The most remarkable of these poems is called *Agraphon*, literally *Unwritten*. The title is perhaps best rendered in English, presaiically, as *Oral Tradition* – for it is a story of Christ not found in any gospel. It is the poem of an Acrite, for it is a cry of hope and courage from the extreme limits of suffering. Outside Hopkins there is perhaps no braver poem – as brave in world-anguish as he is in his personal anguish:

They were walking outside the walls
Of Sion, Jesus and his disciples,
When, just before the sunset,
They came without noticing to the place
Where for years the city used to throw its refuse,
Burnt mattresses of the sick, old rags,
Broken pots, rubbish and filth.

And there, on the top of the highest mound,
Swollen, and with its feet turned up
To the sky, a dead dog's corpse,

Deserted by the crows that covered it
Suddenly, when they heard footsteps ...
It gave forth such a stench that all
The disciples drew back, as with a single movement,
Holding their breath, with the hollow of the hand.

But Jesus alone advancing
Calmly to the mound, stood near
And looked at the corpse. Then one of His disciples
Could not control himself from crying out
From far away: 'Rabbi, how can you stand there?
Surely you smell the horrible stench?'

And He, without turning His head
From the point He was looking at, made answer:
'The horrible stench he whose breath is pure
Smells also in the city that we came from.

But now

I marvel at that which comes out of the corruption
With all my soul ... Look
How the teeth of this dog are shining
In the sun, like hailstones, like lilies,
Apart from the rot, a mighty promise,
A reflection of the Eternal, but also,
A harsh lightning-flash of hope and Justice!'

So He spoke; and if they understood or not
These words, the disciples together,
When He moved, followed Him again, in silence
Upon the way ...

And now,

Surely the last, I turn my mind, O Lord,
Towards those words of Thine, and stand
Before Thee in this thought alone: Ah, grant!
Grant to me also, Lord, while I am walking
Ceaselessly outside the walls of the city of Sion -

And from one end to the other of the earth
All is in ruins, and all is refuse,
And all is bodies unburied that are choking
The holy spring of breath, in the city
Or out of the city – grant to me, O Lord,
In this horrible stench through which I am passing,
For one moment Thy holy calm –
That I may stand serenely in the midst

Of the dead corpses, that I too may seize
In my gaze somewhere upon some white point,
Like hailstones, or like lilies –
Something that flashes suddenly, and deep within me,
Out of the rot, apart from the rot
Of the world – like the teeth of that dog,
Which, O Lord, seeing them that afternoon,
Thou didst marvel at, a mighty promise,
A reflection of the Eternal, yes, and also
A harsh lightning-flash of hope and Justice!

Kathleen Raine

MICHAEL ROBERTS AND
THE HERO MYTH

A poem in Michael Roberts's first volume, *These our Matins*, is entitled 'On Reading Some Neglected Poets.' The symbolism is simple, but characteristic, even perhaps prophetic – for all poets are in some sense the prophets of at least their own destinies. The neglected poets travel on 'a long road in a dubious mist.' They must go on to the limit of their endurance,

And maybe no one will ever come,
No other traveller passing that way,
Therefore the load we lifted will be left,
A milestone, insignificant.

In a later, and finer poem, contemporary man visits the pre-historic caves where he finds the traces of his predecessors on the verge of unexplored darkness:

This was the point we reached, the farthest known.

Here someone in the debris found an arrow,
Men have been here before, and left their mark,
Scratched on the limestone wall with splintered bone.

Here the dark word was said for memory's sake,
And lost, here on the cold sand, to the puzzled brow:

This was the farthest point, the fabled lake:
These were our footprints, seven lives ago.

This symbol of the utmost limit that can be reached by man recurs constantly and in many forms in Roberts's

poetry. It is essentially a tragic symbol, of the mortal pitted against the immortal, man against the gods. The contest is an unequal one; the footprints stop at 'the farthest point', the last milestone on a desolate road, at the edge of a glacier or a crevasse, in sand, in sea, at the world's end. We may explore our platonic cave, but we cannot escape from it.

Roberts – and in this he spoke for his generation – accepted the dialectic of heroism, took up the challenge of the gods. Man's greatness lies in fighting his losing battle, invading the territory of the absolute as far as he may, leaving the human traces, the milestones, the arrow-heads, the scratched symbols of words – at the utmost limit of his finite but expanding universe. Roberts saw it most clearly in terms of mountaineering, and it is characteristic of him that he chose to commit some of his profoundest reflections not to the literary periodicals but to the *Alpine Journal*. 'To justify mountaineering in the fullest sense', he wrote, 'we must justify the loss of life, the deliberate taking of risks. And I think the only answer is in the sheer uselessness of the loss: man can preserve his dignity, only by showing that he is not afraid of anything, not even death ... Sacrifices are good because they show superiority to all mere utilitarian values: they show an excess and overflow which is really a gesture of confidence and vitality. The primitive man who sacrifices his last loaf is not necessarily a fool: he may die of starvation but he shows the spirit of a race that will not die.'

It is Auden, to be sure, who, in his *Journal of an Airman, Paid on Both Sides, The Ascent of F6* and the rest, has expressed the myth of his decade – 'The thing that explorers and buggers are after' – in its most brilliant and memorable form. Roberts's version is simpler, more stark, but – by his own early death, that seems in retrospect so inevitable a part of his poetry – complete.

The typical 'thirties hero was not confined to poetry; the myth was being lived as well. Those were the years of the great Himalayan expeditions, Shipton and Tilman on Nanda Devi and Everest; J. B. Auden and Michael Spender, both

brothers of poets, were on the Karakoram expedition. Roberts himself might very easily, with only a slight shift in the pattern of his life, have been one of those who lived the myth instead of one of those who wrote it. He was in fact an amateur mountaineer, and lived on the watershed, so to speak, between the poet and the man of action. All who remember him will recall the contrast between the bespectacled intellectual face, the face of a solitary thinker; the delicate, imaginative hands; and the tall, lithe, whip-cord figure of the man of great physical endurance who spares neither himself nor others, but must always press on, to the summits, to the poles, to the world's end.

War was another version of the 'thirties myth, Auden's airman or Day Lewis's (notably in *The Flight*), the Spanish Civil War poems of Spender; and indeed two poets (one a soldier, the other a pacifist), John Cornford and Julian Bell, fell in Spain. Leaving, for a moment, the political aspect of the legend, these soldier-heroes of the 'thirties were adventurers, like the mountaineers and explorers. Yeats's 'Lonely impulse of delight', not any mass compulsion, moved such men. Roberts occasionally used this war imagery; 'The limp crashed airman, in the splintered goggles,' the crew of the Russian ice-breaker *Chelyuskin*, are occasional deviations from the mountaineering symbolism that he preferred. As long ago as 1930 he wrote a poem entitled *Schneider Cup*, replete with pulsating pistons, the turbines and the million volts that characterize the world of applied science in which the 'thirties soldier hero played with his beautiful stream-lined dangerous machines like a Greek athlete with the wild boar or the discus. But these heroes of applied science are, from another point of view, only the phenomenal shadows of an adventure of another kind. In Roberts's poetry at all events, one can trace the heroic conception to an unexpected source, not to political causes nor to the sense of impending war, but to the point reached by the natural sciences at that time.

It is of no use anyone trying to understand the poetry of

the 'thirties for whom intellectual knowledge is not in itself a matter for passionate poetic excitement. There is no more passionate poetry of that decade than William Empson's metaphysical verse, full of imagery of surface tensions and calcinations. And so with Roberts, whose poetry is exceptionally free from emotional themes – which is one reason, possibly, why we did not take to it when we were younger. Roberts, like Empson, like J. B. Bronowski (is it a standard Cambridge pattern?) was a scientist – (a mathematician and physicist?) – before he was a poet. Now the scientist is concerned always with the farthest limits of his field of knowledge, of some sector of the flaming ramparts of the world which he holds – perhaps holds alone. The faces of the physicists, the biochemists, the astronomers are turned towards the unknown. They are, in the intellectual world, what explorers are in the physical – lonely figures or little groups, pressing on to the utmost limits of knowledge. We have lived in the heroic age of science.

Long before Roberts had ever climbed a mountain he was concerned with that arduous mental exploration of which mountaineering afterwards became, for him, the perfect symbol.

Grey hill, granitic rock, be mine
Own thought. Let groping, grappling mist
Be backward borne to the green line
That the wind cut, the sun kissed.

And march, imponderable stars,
In mind's dimension, bring to birth,
In formal symbol, Venus, Mars,
And map the orbit, map the earth.

—

Through dim notation feeble rays
Born of the dark companion shine,

A man should find words for the thoughts that no one
knows.

At any rate, there was no room for us at the big
hotel.

Stone and rock, if one examines these symbols in their context, are invariably, in Roberts's poetry, associated with intellectual and rational activity. This symbolism is not peculiar to himself, but probably universal. Blake's Urizen, for example, the faculty of reason, is master of the world of 'rocky destiny.' The Greek goddess of reason carried on her shield a face whose gaze turned living forms to stone. So in Roberts's poetry, 'thought is a stony place', 'In bright and liquid crystal air The mental mode is sculptural'; 'Mind in action is machine Quarrying stern and stubborn fact' - 'But wind and weather wreck the blind And bleak cathedrals of the mind'; the logical, lucid music of Bach is 'architectural'. The world of stony fact can baffle and defeat the mind, but it can also be shaped into architecture. Before Roberts's symbol for the relation of man to reality crystallized finally in mountain symbolism, architecture was the one to which he most often returned. And there is a very fine, if not uniformly successful, late poem, *Dionysus* in which this stone symbolism is envisaged as a stone head, a god whose features have been carved by man on the 'firm rock-final matrix' of reality - 'The definite shape of truth in real stone.'

There is yet another facet to this heroic view of life, perhaps the most important one. The mountaineer is the antithesis of Blake who plunged into the abyss to 'see if providence is here also.'

His every act is conscious, voluntary, the outcome of choice, of man's free will carried to its extreme point. The hero does not cast himself into the arms of providence; it is he himself, as man, who must act, and indeed one of the temptations of Jesus was to relinquish prematurely his human responsibility, to cast himself into the arms of angels

— and that too on a high stony place. The hero is essentially man in process of becoming. He is finding the answers, but does not yet know them.

The mountaineer relies upon himself,

... grasping, testing

Flake and uncertain crevice, wavering, trusting
Skill in the quivering muscle, slipping, straining,
Gaining new hand- and foothold, resting, rising ...

Auden's airman, like Roberts's mountaineer, is alert, keyed up for action, 'Hands in perfect condition', as Auden says, symbol of man's control of his own destiny. Auden's poems are full of injunctions to the hero to avoid this, beware of that, watch the other man, and heed a chorus of moral imperatives that are the antithesis of the imperatives of nature, or, indeed, of the supernatural. They come, rather, from the superego, and the hero is perhaps simply man's ego, pitted against the powers within himself no less than the powers without. These poets, at all events, do not, 'hail the superhuman' whether as Lawrence's dark gods, or as Yeats's darker ones. For those who lose themselves in the darkness of nature, or in the light of vision, the heroic situation no longer exists; death no longer is tragic, or even real, and neither, perhaps, is life. But it is to be remembered that Yeats, who of all contemporary poets understood most clearly the meaning of the superhuman, who, like Plotinus, saw the whole of human history as a masque of the gods, had of all modern poets the greatest sense, also, of the heroic. Self for Yeats is the worthy antagonist of soul. It is for man to retain his identity in the flux of things.

Moral conflict, therefore, is of the very essence of this attitude that I have called heroic — man against the gods, ego against the unconscious. A poem of Roberts's written in 1938 states the moral predicament of conscious man, who must make choices, as contrasted with the animal who is not beset with alternatives:

THE IMAGES OF DEATH

The hawk, the furred eagle, the smooth panther --
 Images of desire and power, images of death,
 These we adore and fear, these we need,
 Move in the solitude of night or the tall sky,
 Move with a strict grace to the one fulfilment:
 The Greenland falcon, the beautiful one,
 Lives on carrion and dives inevitably to the prey.

To be human is more difficult:
 To be human is to know oneself, to hold the broken
 mirror,
 To become aware of justice, truth, mercy,
 To choose the difficult road, to aim
 Crookedly, for the direct aim is failure,
 To abandon the way of the hawk and the grey falcon.

These fall, and fall stupidly:
 To be human is to fall, but not stupidly;
 To suffer, but not for a simple end;
 To choose, and know the penalty of choice ...

To fall, to suffer, to choose – these are tasks for the hero, the man who wills to be his own master. For Yeats the dance is the symbol of the order that moves the body from beyond the individual will. Men dance on deathless feet, the body is swayed to music with the rhythm of animate creation – the same rhythm that D. H. Lawrence discovered in sex and death. So also is the soul for the sages of Byzantium also ‘perne in a gyre.’ The act of saint and sage, like the act of the animal, is one-pointed, without conflict. Neither animals nor saints are beset with alternatives. Auden, Rupert Doone, the dancer, has often said to me, is an enemy of the dance. The moral man is bound to be so, bound to mistrust the irrational, involuntary power, whether of instinct or of inspiration, that moves us from beyond ourselves, to a design

we do not understand, to an end we do not know. The alertness, the concentration, the wariness of the 'thirties hero is at the opposite extreme from the certainty of those who 'dance on deathless feet.'

Roberts did not believe that pain and evil are unreal. Those who deny their reality are, in effect, denying the reality of the ego that suffers them – the self who is, one must remember, the hero. 'The existence of evil, in the world and in ourselves, is as real and demonstrable as the existence of crevasses in the Mer de Glace and bad rock on the Matterhorn,' and to ignore it is to live in a fool's paradise. So also pain is real, so long as humanity remains:

With the dignity of stars, with a planet's motion,
Pain moves across that sky,
And sufferings not ours
Ring out their agony to the end of time.

...

Never, in all the cataract of time,
Can the glaring comet end:
The instrument of will
Must move unswerving on its narrow path.

Matter is real: the reality of man
Must move across that sky
Under the eye of heaven,
Proclaim the light of heaven and cast its shadow.

Even in conflict, it is the superhuman antagonist that lends dignity to the hero. But at other times, when man sinks back, ebbs away from his own energetic consciousness, the quiet call of the gods is heard as not hostile. Angels do not always come to wrestle:

There is music in movement, in the song, the dance,
The swing of the accordion in the crowded hut,
The swing of the axe in the icefall; but be still.
Listen. There is another voice that speaks.

For Roberts, that call is always a voice, a bird voice, or sometimes music. He was not always willing to heed it, and knew what it is to anger the gods:

... it shrieks, and there is neither love nor pain;
It calls suddenly in the quietest of places ...

...

It is the rip-saw screaming by the waterfall,
It is the child of our own being, and we must learn
to kill it.

But with what gentleness, with what poisoned love,
Between the dark pine-trees and the poised water:
It is the voice of truth that kills us as we kill;
It speaks plainly.

In the later poem, *Dionysus*, the poet consents to listen to the voice. 'One day the voice will speak to me if I listen.'

I must wait patiently where the words move
Like shoals of shining fish, or like the beasts
That slink between the shadows, or like birds
Screaming at dusk in the high trees.

...

Patiently, without words, the stone speaks
In worlds beyond the world of words of thought:
The message has no name, and is as gentle
Whether we come or go.

When man refuses to listen to this voice, the superhuman must be experienced as a great indifferent *néant*, and the conscious order, so hardly won from the rock and the interstellar void, the world known to human consciousness, the only order there is. Auden's fine poem in *The Sea and the Mirror* measures the kingdom of Naples against the indifference of the sea to sceptres and those who wield them. For

Roberts this world of *néant* is symbolized in the indifference of stars and night. Mountains are just accessible, they are the world's end; but constellations are for ever beyond the hero's reach. After mountains, constellations are, I think, the most potent symbols in his poetry. Ice, the world of death, is the last point that man can reach. 'The ice-axe rings on the final slope' as man makes his way to the precarious triumph of the summit. But beyond that point lies

the infinite desolation through the stars,
the interstellar cold, the world of stone,
when love, like blossom, falls away.

There is a point of reconciliation of man with the gods, and this point is heroic death, man's ultimate defeat and final glory. For the hero indeed apotheosis is harder than all his labours, it consists in nothing less than ceasing to be the hero, in laying down, consciously, all that by his labours and triumphs he has won. Roberts struggled, I think, with this final submission, over many years.

The point at which he failed as a poet, and perhaps as a man, was his too great reliance on the active, masculine will, and an insufficient acceptance of the passive, intuitive side of his nature, which did indeed 'kill him as he killed', at least as a poet.

Most terrible to the hero is the laying down of that alert consciousness, that tensed masculine will, that human identity that belongs to him, above all other kinds of men. Roberts suffered to the full, I believe, that anguish which the mystic, who has already gone over, as it were, to the super-human, and accepted (in some cases perhaps prematurely) the transience of his human identity, hardly knows. At Tignes, a valley doomed to be flooded, he wrote in 1946 his lament for the transience of life – one of the very few poems that he wrote that strikes a note of pathos:

A stone falls from the bridge, and no one heeds it:
The bridge will last for one more winter.

The old men look their last on barn and hay-loft:
All things must perish.

The Isère, like a young colt, gallops among the rocks
But the river-bed will vanish:
All things will vanish on a summer's day:
The meadow and the pathway and the churchyard.

.

All things must perish now, under the level water:
The cobbler's and the Mairie, Rimmer's shop,
The room we danced in, back in 'thirty-one,
All things will vanish.

The following winter, the fells of Westmorland had the same message for him:

Stone country cannot suffer
Your loss or mine;
The valley guards its sorrow
At this New Year.

There is much bitterness in many of these late poems, hopeless sickness of heart. And yet, in June 1947 he wrote a poem that completes his myth, and accepts apotheosis, at the only price at which it is given to man – that of death.

DEATH HAS ITS OWN REPLY

Wisdom is knowledge and a living wit,
Book-dust and acid, unforgotten skill:
You almost learn to cheat the Absolute.
Death has its own reply.

Wisdom is action and a new decision,
The bursting bud, passion, a mind rejecting
The flowers of sentiment and the tarnished mirror:
Death has its own reply.

Wisdom is weary strength and fond endurance,
The children laughing in the tangled garden,
The Egyptian wheat that waits a thousand years:
Death has its own reply.

Wisdom is death and transubstantiation,
A sudden glory in a world of pain,
The flame consuming and the world consumed;
And death has no reply.

The hero's last victory is his acceptance of defeat. But the precarious triumph of human existence is worth something, after all:

Colour and form run through the brittle pages,
And Time can crumble all, but cannot touch
The book that burns, faster than we can read.

I have perhaps said too little about the political version of the theme – an important aspect of the myth, that attracted all the Oxford and several Cambridge poets – Julian Bell, John Lehmann, and John Cornford – at one moment, towards Communism and, in particular, lent to the Spanish Civil War a meaning that seemed to them more significant than the issues of the later World War. For a short time this leftist imagery appears in Roberts's poems, but not for long; not indeed because politics ceased to concern him, but because he followed out his political trains of thought in his prose writings, particularly in *The Recovery of the West*, which many critics regard as his most important work. Of that I am unable to judge. I would only observe, in passing, that the theme of that book – Roberts's consciously-held belief that European democracy is likely to survive and recover – is contradicted (implicitly) in a long poem, written at about the same time, on the Mongolian conqueror Chingis Kahn. This poem describes the cruel yet purging conquest of the civilized cities by the barbarian. It is a

SVEN BERLIN



Reclining Figure
(Polyphant Stone – 1948)

BRYAN WINTER



Herring Gulls (1948)



Moorland Cottages (1948)

TOM EARLY



Power House and Church, Lelant (1947)



Mine Chimneys, Redruth (1948)

DENIS MITCHELL



Tin Mining in Cornwall (1946)



Lanyon Quoit (1947)

bloodthirsty, virile, not very good poem, but it shows that in his conscious adoption of one view in his political thought Roberts had not wholly rid himself of the other alternative. To say that either represents his 'real belief' would be untrue. What is certain is that he was aware of the alternatives.

This study of Roberts's poetry would be incomplete if I were to overlook another element that is, rather unexpectedly perhaps, present alongside the moral adventure of the hero. With Edwin Muir and Robert Graves Roberts shared an element that belongs to the opposite, the oracular kind of poetry, to the poetry of Yeats and the symbolists. There are some quite remarkable outcrops of purely archetypal imagery that break through into the selfconscious, controlled world of the ego-hero. There is the Eden of *The Strange Isle*:

In the strange isle,
In the green freckled wood and grassy glade,
Strangely the man, the panther and the shadow
Move by the well and the white stones.

The terrible obverse of this world where 'a million butterflies are sunlit eyes' is the serpent implicit in the 'twining circles' of wheeling birds, in the 'fang of the lily'. There is a tower, age-old, to which the hero has a key. The tower belongs to the past. 'The tower had vanished ... Years before Ganlion's time. But Ganlion came.' I see an affinity with Robert Graves in the sort of intellectual sparring with archetypal symbols like Ganlion's tower, Erwin (Roberts's version of the man who 'contains in his mighty limbs all things in heaven and earth'), or the hero Diomed who meets an old man against whom sword and shield can avail him nothing. For Roberts, as for Graves, there is no submission to these symbols. The tension between mystery and mastery is the point of the poem, and gives symbols that in Edwin Muir or in Yeats would trail their divinity, a kind of astringency peculiar to these primarily intellectual poets.

Ganlion came to the tower: the rusty lock
Fell at a single touch, the brambles parted,
Swiftly the bats were gone and the haunting light:
It was a plain tower, though in ruins, and no nonsense.

There is no important influence, no important experience of the period between the wars that Roberts did not respond to and digest. His was one of the most living minds of his time; and if his own poems lack the compelling brilliance of Auden, the intellectual passion of Empson, or the visionary clarity of Edwin Muir, they are an integral part of the same structure of which Auden's and Empson's poems are the most conspicuous ornaments. His poetry will stand the test of hard intellectual analysis, and moral experience. His style lacks grace, but it is virile and firm. His imagery is not brilliant, like Auden's, or analysed to the lest decimal place of meaning, like Empson's. He has no song, nor dance. He was no stylist, and even the best of his poems are a little laboured, a little flat, so that one has to read them several times to see that there is often a great deal more to them than appears at first – strength of thought, a comprehensive grasp of a subject. One of Spender's best poems begins, 'I think continually of those who are truly great.' Roberts never mentions greatness by name, but nearly all his poems are about aspects of human greatness. He was, above all, a mature man while Spender and Auden were still expressing the emotions and thinking the thoughts of schoolboys. His is a tragic view of life, but one with no pathos. As one grows older, one appreciates much in his poetry which passed unnoticed earlier and to his own generation some of his poems will stand as milestones in our human experience.

John Lehmann

THE LIFE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

At one time in my life I wanted to write poetry above all things, and I went to Vienna to devote myself to it. I don't quite know why I chose Vienna – I am sure the reasons I gave myself and others at the time only partly expressed the truth – but it seems to me now that I was drawn on by obscure impressions of childhood, things told me or overheard by me or seen in picture books, and sustained by the thought that I should be absolutely alone. And one of the few books I took with me, perhaps the one I was most careful to pack, was an English translation of Rilke's *Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*.

It was not my first acquaintance with this extraordinary book, which I now think one of the most original and beautiful books of the twentieth century; I had already, at various times, dipped into it, and I had already fallen under the spell of Rilke's poetry that has worked so powerfully on my generation; but I was now going to immerse myself in it under the conditions in which it demands to be read: in solitude, in a strange city, and with poetry in my head. It stayed with me, my favourite reading, all that late summer and autumn. Much of it I found hermetic, even incomprehensible, and impossible to relate to any central pattern; for it demands not only some knowledge of Rilke's own life to explain its riddles, but also a marriage of experience and ideas of which I was still too young to be aware. Again and again, however, I came upon passages that enthralled and haunted me, and one passage in particular that I read and re-read and tried to absorb into myself with all my assimilative powers of mind, the passage in which Malte describes how to be a poet:

‘Verses amount to so little when one begins to write them young. One ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness a whole life long, and a long life if possible, and then, quite at the end, one might perhaps be able to write ten good lines. For verses are not, as people imagine, simply feelings (we have these soon enough); they are experiences. In order to write a single verse, one must see many cities, and men and things; one must get to know animals and the flight of birds, and the gestures that the little flowers make when they open out in the morning. One must be able to return in thought to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected encounters, and to partings that had been long foreseen; to days of childhood that are still indistinct, and to parents whom one had to hurt when they sought to give one some pleasure which one did not understand (it would have been a pleasure to someone else); to childhood’s illnesses that so strangely begin with such a number of profound and grave transformations, to days spent in rooms withdrawn and quiet, and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to oceans, to nights of travel that rushed along loftily and flew with all the stars – and still it is not enough to be able to think of all this. There must be memories of many nights of love, each one unlike the others, of the screams of women in labour, and of women in childbed, light and blanched and sleeping, shutting themselves in. But one must also have been beside the dying, must have sat beside the dead in a room with open windows and with fitful noises. And still it is not enough yet to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many, and one must have the immense patience to wait until they come again. For it is the memories themselves that matter. Only when they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves – only then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a poem arises in their midst and goes forth from them.’

This seemed to me then one of the most wonderful, releasing statements about poetry that I had ever read. It is, I can now see, an ideal which might lead to the writing of a great deal of very bad poetry, unless corrected by what one might call the *grammarian's* attitude which had been in fashion in the circles I moved in at Cambridge and directly after: the view that the first essential for the poet is to be able to think clearly and to use words precisely, and to express a certain intellectual energy in his views by his wit, in the sense of the term defined by T. S. Eliot. If the ultra-romantic view was responsible for a great deal of showy nonsense, this grammarian's view, admirable in its due place and proportion, was in danger, if slavishly followed, of producing mere arid exercises, the purely masculine without that feminine and intuitive element which is essential to poetry; all the more arid and marginal if the poet had also come under the influence of the equally fashionable 'clinical' view, which insisted that poetry was the resolution in words of obscure psychological tensions in the mind of its author. Rilke's words, so eloquent, so simple and so evocative, avoiding so carefully the exalted peaks of the claims made by the great romantics such as Shelley, seemed to me to present exactly what was missing in these views: a vision of how poetry was created or should be created in our post-romantic age, not by taking great themes and giving them the noblest treatment one was capable of, but by allowing the whole of experience, of years of thought and feeling and observation to be distilled in the depths of one's imagination, unforced and unhurried, to form this precious fluid. And, above all, it presented a design for the dedicated life a poet should lead, not merely for his working hours but for the whole preparation of himself before and between those (perhaps very brief) periods.

This ideal, of a life devoted to poetry, planned to provide the opportunity for every kind of experience that might nurture the poetic being and avoid every experience and entanglement that might be destructive to it, was grand

enough when Rilke wrote the *Notebook* before the first world war. It is grander, in fact it is heroic now, when the wars and revolutions of our age have destroyed the old Europe – in which leisure was possible even if only for the more fortunate classes and those to whom they acted as patrons – and when the cancerous development of state control and interference has created an environment where everything conspires to ruin the inner life.

The fulfilment of the inner life was Rilke's own supreme object, and the passion with which he endowed Malte. Almost the last words in the *Notebook* are:

'Long ago he had detached himself from the accidents of fate to which men cling, but now even whatever of pleasure and pain were necessary lost their spicy after-taste and became pure and nourishing to him. From the roots of his being there sprang the sturdy, evergreen plant of a fertile joy. He was wholly engrossed in learning to handle what constituted his inner life; he wanted to omit nothing, for he doubted not that his love dwelt and grew in all this. Indeed, his inward serenity went so far that he resolved to overtake the most important of those things which he had hitherto been unable to accomplish, the things he had simply allowed to slip past while he waited.'

The *Notebook* itself can be described as the record of how Rilke learnt, in the first period of his life as a poet, to 'handle his inner life': it is a distillation of experience, through the invented character of the young Danish poet, that follows remarkably faithfully the prescription for a poet's life Rilke gives within it. All the wanderings, both over Europe and inside his own world of thought, all the emotions and spiritual struggles, all the provocative outward events and inward imaginative discoveries of six years of Rilke's life are mirrored in Malte's notebook; and the history of its development is a fascinating study of his creative processes at work.

We know from Maurice Betz, with whom Rilke collaborated in the French translation of the *Notebook* during his stay in Paris in 1925, that the original germ was Rilke's discovery of a book called *The Diary of a Priest*, by Sigbjørn Obstfelder, a young Norwegian writer who had come to live in Paris and died there at the early age of thirty-two. Rilke read this story of the struggles of a tormented soul to find God, a pursuit that ends in madness, at a time when his enthusiasm for anything Scandinavian was at its height; and the fact that Obstfelder had, like Rilke, been a stranger alone in Paris as a young man, made a special bond of sympathy. Rilke seems to have been haunted by the Norwegian from the beginning: and in the end his imaginative occupation of his life became so intense that he speaks of Malte as if he were a living person, always beside him; who was, as it were, dictating the book. 'I must not advance beyond him and his suffering too far,' he says in a letter to his wife in 1908, 'otherwise I will no longer understand him.' It is always in this strain that he speaks of the book; and his description of the sudden sprouting of the seed that Obstfelder's work had planted in his mind is like the account of a spiritual possession. Maurice Betz reports Rilke as telling him the story as follows:

'At that time I was in Rome. I had been living for several months in a little studio which had been lent me in the park of the Villa Strohl-Fern. The Italian spring disappointed me by its undue haste, and my reading of Jacobsen awakened my longing for that Northern country where I knew no one except the good Ellen Key, to whom I had dedicated *The Stories of God*. I wrote a series of dialogues between a young man and a young girl who confide their little secrets to each other. The young man told the girl a great deal about a Danish poet, a certain Malte, whom he had known and who died young in Paris. The girl wanted to know more about Malte, and the young man was indiscreet enough to tell her that his

friend had left a diary, while he admitted that he himself had never looked into it yet. The girl begged him to let her see it. I succeeded in keeping her waiting for several days by various subterfuges, but her curiosity increased and in the end she began to build up her own picture of Malte. I realized that it was not permissible for me to offer resistance any longer, and so I interrupted the dialogue and began to write Malte's own diary without troubling any more with the subsidiary personages who had led me to him almost against my will.'

From that moment in 1904, *The Notebook* was always in Rilke's mind; and from 1906 to 1910, with occasional intervals of a few weeks or months when Malte's problems became too difficult for him to solve and he had to turn away from the 'heavy, heavy book', it was his major pre-occupation as a writer. During that time he was restless and dissatisfied, with frequent breakdowns in health, always moving from one place to another, but experiencing new scenes and making new friends – among them, one of the most important in his whole life, Rodin – the stimulus of which can be traced again and again in the *Notebook*. There was, first of all, the excitement of getting to know Denmark, the country he was to make Malte's own. It is probably true, as Countess Wydenbruck suggests in her book,* that the friends he made during these years among the North German Lutheran nobility, were as important, or even more important than his brief experiences of Denmark itself, in providing him with material for building up the background of Malte's family. Nevertheless, the Danish visit was responsible for at least one of the most striking and characteristic passages in the *Notebook*, where the young Malte and his mother visit the family of the Schulins, the great central wing of whose manor-house has recently been burnt down. Rilke describes the arrival by sleigh, in darkness and snowstorm:

**Rilke: Man and Poet*, a book to which I am indebted for more than I can say in the preparation of this study.

'One might have imagined one saw the church tower on the left, but suddenly the outline of the park wall appeared, high up, almost on top of us, and we found ourselves in the long avenue. The tinkling of the bells no longer ceased abruptly; it seemed to hang in clusters right and left on the trees. Then we swung in and drove around something, passed something else on the right, and came to a halt in the centre.

'Georg had quite forgotten that the house was no longer there, and for all of us at that moment it was there. We ascended the front steps that led up to the old terrace, and only wondered at finding all in darkness. Suddenly a door opened below and behind us on the left, and someone cried, "This way!" at the same time lifting and swinging a dim lantern. My Father laughed: "We are wandering about here like ghosts," and he helped us down the steps again.

"But still there was a house there just now," said Mother....'

The actual experience from which this episode was created is related in a letter to Lou Andreas Salomé in December, 1904. He describes how he went to visit his Danish friend Ellen Key in a lonely country house that belonged to her brother:

'We found ourselves in the courtyard, enclosed by the small lateral wings of the chateau. But there, where four flights of steps ascended with a great effort from the deep snow of the courtyard to the terrace, on which a balustrade with ornamental vases appeared to herald the chateau itself, there was nothing except a few snow-covered shrubs and a grey, glimmering sky, against which I could distinguish snowflakes falling through the twilight. I had to remind myself that the building no longer existed, that I had been told how it had burnt down to the ground years ago, but still I could not help feeling

that there must be something there, that the air behind the balustrade was not the same as the air around, but was still divided into passages and rooms and a great central hall, a high, empty, forsaken, twilit hall ...'

Thus the actual description in the *Notebook* is taken almost exactly from Rilke's own experience at Oby, but he transforms and enlarges it by making it pass through the wondering mind of a small boy who, quickly taking up the hint dropped by his Mother, is overcome by the idea of this phantom house, tries to slip away to see it again, and *believes* in it in spite of the laughter of the others: "'Of course they only go when it is not there," I thought contemptuously: "If Mother and I lived here, it would always be there." Mother looked distraught, while the others were all talking at once. She was certainly thinking of the house.'

Another striking example of Rilke's way of refashioning the experiences of these years to make them part of the *Notebook* is the passage towards the end, where Malte is once more reminded of Abalone, vividly and with a new insight, by a girl he meets at a salon one afternoon in Venice. The famous description of Venice, not 'the soft, narcotic Venice' that is the illusion of the 'somnolent foreigners', but the real Venice of winter that reveals itself when they have gone, 'awake, brittle to breaking-point, and not in the least dream-like: this Venice willed into being in the midst of nothing and set on sunken forests, created by force, and in the end so thoroughly manifest,' 'this inventive state that bartered the salt and glass of its poverty for the treasures of the nations,' was directly inspired by the winter he spent in the city in 1907. The same images occur in a letter he wrote to his wife at the time, and in the poem *Spätherbst in Venedig* which he published in *New Poems*:

Aber vom Grund aus alten Waldskeletten
steigt Willen auf: als sollte über Nacht

der General des Meeres die Galeeren
verdoppeln in dem wachen Arsenal ...

Even more fundamental to the purpose of the book was the vision of Paris he conjured up, in the opening passages, out of his early experiences when he went there for the first time in 1902, and his later impressions in 1907, when he shut himself up in his room in the Rue Cassette and worked at the *New Poems*, the book on Rodin and the *Notebook* itself throughout the summer and autumn. Again, nothing could be less sentimental than the vision this poet, who has so often been accused of sentimentality, created of Paris: for him it seemed always to be a city of macabre happenings, of suffering and poverty (except when he thought of it as the home of Rodin):

‘People come here, then, to live? I should rather have thought that they came here to die. I have been out, and I saw hospitals. I saw a poor fellow stagger and fall. People gathered round him: so I was spared the rest. I saw a pregnant woman. She dragged herself heavily along a high, warm wall, now and again groping for it as if to assure herself it was still there ...’

These are the opening words of the *Notebook*, and they set the tone for all that comes after. His very first letter to his wife from Paris, in 1902, records the same impression, and shows that Malte's, that Obstfelder's nightmares had been his own: ‘I am appalled at the great number of hospitals here. Legions of sick people, armies of dying men, populations of corpses – I have never felt this as strongly in any other city.’ Even the man with St. Vitus's Dance appears first of all as a person actually observed and described in one of his letters a year later. And the harrowing episode of the medical student in the room next door, whose eyelid refused to stay open and who in his misery and nervous exhaustion stamped up and down while a noise repeated itself ‘the noise

made by any round, tin object, such as the lid of a canister when it slips from one's grasp' – this, too, came directly out of his own experience, while he was working at the *Notebook* in the Rue Cassette.

All these scenes, these moments of intense imaginative apprehension, Rilke was able to work into the fabric of the *Notebook*, while preserving the thematic wholeness of the book, with an art that reveals itself as more consummate with every reading. The method he had chosen, the apparently random record of an intimate journal, allowed him considerable latitude; and as he later admitted to Maurice Betz, his idea of giving it the air of incompleteness that the journal of the dead Obstfelder might well have had, so took possession of him that he did not even collect all the fragments he had written at one time or another for use in it. But the book is one: as a poem of loneliness and suffering, of death in all its mysterious and terrible aspects, the spiritual voyage through a haunted darkness of a young man who strives to recapture the beauty and meaning of his childhood; and to fulfil what he had left there incomplete and unsatisfied, by reliving his memories and using all his maturer powers to understand where and why he had failed to answer all the demands of heart and imagination made on him. The *Notebook* was to Rilke a 'heavy, heavy book', causing him such disturbance and exhaustion of spirit, because it was a delving into his own failures in the inner life; and yet, unlike Malte, he finally surmounted these failures – to a miraculous degree by the very fact of writing out Malte's suffering. 'The creative artist is not permitted to select or to turn away from any form of existence,' he wrote in an illuminating letter on Baudelaire's poem *La Charogne* in October 1907, 'surely among his earlier works there must be some where he overcame himself with a mighty effort, right to the utmost limits of love. Beyond this surrender lies saintliness, beginning with small things, the simple existence of a love that has passed the test, and, without boasting, approaches everything.' He was about to make that surrender himself, and

the anticipation of it lies in what follows: 'Suddenly (for the first time) I understood Malte Laurids's fate. Is it not that the ordeal was too great for him, that he could not pass the actual test, though he was theoretically convinced of its necessity, so much so that he sought it out instinctively until it haunted him? The book of Malte Laurids once it is written, will be nothing but the story of this insight, exemplified in one for whom it was too mighty ...'

It was this insight which drew Malte to the story of the Prodigal Son, which forms part of the great coda to the *Notebook*, and out of which Rilke made one of the most beautiful of his shorter poems. Rilke and Malte then become one in what was perhaps the crucial spiritual problem of the poet's earlier years. 'It will be difficult to persuade me,' writes Malte, 'that the story of the Prodigal Son is not the legend of one who did not want to be loved. When he was a child everybody in the house loved him. He grew up knowing nothing else, and as a child he became accustomed to their tenderness. But as a growing boy he sought to lay aside these habits ... what he then desired was that inner indifference of spirit, which, sometimes, of an early morning in the fields, seized him so unalloyed that he began to run, that he might have neither time nor breath to be more than a transient moment in which the morning became conscious of itself.'

The impulse which, obscurely but so intensely, racks the Prodigal Son, is surely the deep instinct of the artist in one of its many disguises – the artist who must, as he becomes conscious of being an artist, learn to apprehend everything for himself and create his own universe before he can go back to the allegiances and habits of his childhood, so as to be strong enough to treat with them on equal terms. The desire not to be 'more than a transient moment in which the morning becomes conscious of itself' is not unlike Keats's idea that a poet must be capable of being everything and nothing and has no identity, and his confession that 'if a sparrow comes before my window I take part in its

existence and pick about the gravel.' The similarity becomes even more striking when Malte goes on to describe, in a passage evidently inspired by Rilke's own holiday in Provence in the spring of 1909, the shepherd's life of the Prodigal Son: 'That was the time which began with his feeling himself a part of the universe and anonymous, like a lingering convalescent. He did not love unless it were that he loved to live. The lowly affection of his sheep did not weigh upon him; like light falling through clouds it dispersed itself about him and gleamed softly on the meadows. In the innocent track of their hunger he strode silently across the pastures of the world. Strangers saw him on the Acropolis; and perhaps he was for a long time one of the shepherds in Les Baux, and saw the petrified age outlast that lofty race which, despite all its acquisition of sevens and threes, could not master the sixteen rays of its star ...'

With Rilke, however, the mood of the Prodigal Son was not simply the impulse of the artist to become anonymous; it was at the same time the struggle against loving and being loved, a struggle that had in the end to be abandoned because the complete person, the complete artist (like Baudelaire) learns to love and be loved without shrinking, and the Prodigal Son (not Malte, but Rilke himself) comes home at last. These two themes are intertwined in the *Note-book*; but the book is even more than the exploration of the artist's need to lose himself and the Prodigal Son's attempt to escape love, because Rilke's unique poetic faculty makes out of all the gropings within the spirit and journeyings in the outer world, a demonstration of his extraordinary sensibility so vivid and convincing that one feels one has acquired a new kind of perception. One actually *sees* with him a woman, too suddenly disturbed in her private thoughts, leaving her face in her hands and exposing something flayed and terrible to the onlooker; and one actually comes to think of death as a being that possesses (has always, in a slow process of growth, possessed) the dying creature and finally enacts its own individual drama 'one *had* it, and

that gave one a singular dignity, a quiet pride.' And more than that, with its movement from Malte's own childhood reminiscences, the way of life in the old country houses, to his wanderings in the great cities, and from them to recreations of legends and famous moments of history, it achieves an evocation of the ancient Europe, a four-dimensional evocation of a haunting resonance and depth. How deliberately this was in Rilke's design, one cannot be sure, but once one has observed how as an artist he loves to present symbols and drop hints within his work of what the work as a whole is fulfilling, one remembers in this connexion the picture at the end of the *Notebook* of the sage, the older man who has travelled much in his youth and has long been considered eccentric, as the light burns late in his study:

'He does not always remain bent over his pages; he often leans back and closes his eyes on a line he has read again and again, and its meaning passes into his blood. Never before has he been so certain of the ancient past. He could almost smile at the generations that have mourned it as a lost drama, in which they would have liked to play a part. Now he instantly understands the dynamic significance of that early world-unity, which was something like a new and simultaneous gathering up of all human labour ...'

In writing the *Notebook* Rilke felt, in a strange way, that he was exploring deeper even than in the poetry he had written hitherto. In his letters we find him talking of going back to the 'discipline of writing verses' and seeking renewal in nature, so that the inner world from the depths of which the *Notebook* was emerging should be 'strengthened and tautened by the influences of the external world' – as if his poetry, compared with his prose, was part of that external world; and in a letter to Rodin, in December 1908, he says: 'In writing poetry one is always helped, and even carried

along, by the rhythm of external things – the waters, the winds, the night. But to acquire the rhythms of prose one must go deep down into oneself and find the anonymous and manifold rhythms of the blood.’

It was indeed out of these depths that the *Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* was created, and because Rilke was courageous and persistent enough, in spite of illness and misery and the resistance of the wounded memory, to explore them fully, it stands out, ever more clearly as the years go by, as a masterpiece. No book of our time is more passionately dedicated to the inner life, more completely infused with the belief in the primacy of the imagination, of the poetic way of apprehending life; and as the threat to all that means increases like the deafening roar of a flight of super-bombers in the sky, so we instinctively reach out to hold such precious things closer to us.

J. P. Hodin

CORNISH RENAISSANCE

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I

Some unforgettable impressions remain in my memory from my first visit to Cornwall, each new in itself and belonging to different spheres of sensation. The strange Cornish landscape with its white china clay dumps near St. Austell, the disused mine shafts scattered here and there in deserted places which remind one of the temples of a forgotten religion, and the granite shores, with their picturesque harbours such as Polperro, St. Ives, Newlyn, Mevagissey, Mousehole, beaten by the waters of the Atlantic and the Channel, the moors between, and the regular pattern of small square fields and grey stone houses stretching from sea to sea.

Here is the living ground from which one of the oldest European cultures has grown, the monuments of which still speak to us in their silent but forceful language of the Celtic ancestors' fight with the elements and with the saints. But Cornwall has voices of the present as well: there are new creative forces arising from the old soil. Sponsored by its good geniuses, the peculiar landscape, a strong cultural background and a new cosmopolitan consciousness of human values, they have already begun what might be called a Cornish Renaissance. 'Culture is everywhere, or it is nowhere: the whole people has it, or nobody has it. A small cultural élite in an otherwise barbarous country is probably an élite which has absorbed some foreign culture. If culture is to flourish in the metropolis, it must flourish in every village. It will be slightly different in every region, as also in every social level; because it is something which grows. The whole culture of a nation will be a harmonious organic pattern of a number of parts. The parts would not be the same

if they were not parts of the whole, and the whole would not be a whole body if it was not composed of parts which differ from each other.' This is from an address given during the war by T. S. Eliot on the subject of Cultural Diversity and European Unity. What is happening in Cornwall attracts our interest not only from the local point of view but as an expression of British and, one might even say, of a universal culture in a world in which there is no common denominator of artistic and ethical standards.

The artists who for one reason or another have settled in Cornwall, and through their activities, their character and their aims have not only attracted but deeply influenced and educated a whole generation, are not Cornish. There is *Bernard Leach*, the master potter, who in 1920 built his workshop at St. Ives. Born in Hong Kong of English parents, Bernard Leach lived for many years in Japan and brought with him not only the old Eastern tradition of his craft but also the deep religious consciousness of the East and, one might even say, a deep religious approach to the work of human hands. 'I used to have prejudices against industry and machinery and I have become a little less prejudiced,' he once said to me. 'I think that the machine is of help to humanity. But we have to inspire this external activity through an internal fervour.' Leach has started lately with a group of people who under his leadership work by hand against the background of industry. There is love, pleasure and co-operation in their work. They have a certain faith about the matter, that the world needs it. 'If people would plan their activities more with their hearts and not only with their brains, it would be a more peaceful world.' In the case of Leach it is rather a question of life including art than of art including life. And so the workshop of Leach has become a centre of artistic and moral energy, where young people from different countries meet and are inspired and strengthened.

Another centre is the house where Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth have lived for many years. Ben Nicholson

brought *Naum Gabo*, the Russian-born constructivist, to Cornwall, and as Leach expressed it in a letter to me: 'It was a privilege to have him here during the war years and after - Gabo now lives in America - and his stimulus has left us a legacy of young and promising artists. This may compensate him for lack of recognition in this country as a creative factor in European art.' Gabo was a personality with a strong and even intolerant belief, like that of the old prophets, in his constructive realism. 'It is only through a new plastic vision of the coming artist, that science can ever hope to achieve ... the incorporation of its new image of the world into the mentality of mankind. We are living in a section of history when a new civilization is being forged. It is my firm belief that our new civilization will be constructive or it won't be at all.' And how proudly he felt as an artist in our utilitarian age we realize when we read the warning he issued to all those who hold the chains of power over the world of to-day. 'I the artist, the pushed and battered artist of to-day, warn them all that they will do better and get more out of me, if they leave me alone to do my work. They will never succeed, no matter how much they try, in enslaving my mind without extinguishing it. I will never enlist in the suite of heralds and trumpeters of their petty glories and bestial quarrels. They may vilify my ideas, they may slander my work, they may chase me from one country to another, they may perhaps eventually succeed in starving me, but I shall never, never conform to their ignorance and to their prejudices.'*

There was *Christopher Wood* who did his best paintings in Brittany and in Cornwall, an artist with a child-like heart, feeling his way back to primitivism. He certainly would have attracted to himself the lightning of Gabo's advanced ideas who only saw in artists like Wood, or in the genuine Cornish primitive and fisherman *Alfred Wallis* (discovered by Wood and Nicholson) only people who 'prefer to look for shelter in

* Quoted from a lecture held in America and read in Leach's workshop for the circle of Gabo's friends.

the civilization of the cave-man with all the consequences involved in a cave mentality.' There was also *Adrian Stokes* who, together with the Nicholsons, during the time he stayed in Cornwall gave decisive impulses to the younger generation of artists. *Ben Nicholson* and Stokes came to Cornwall with all the refinement of the French spirit in art, and Ben Nicholson, especially through the clarity of his aesthetic aims, and his firmness in fighting for his abstract ideas in a country so definitely opposed to all artistic experiments, gave a lead and an example of how an artist should stand in a community. *Barbara Hepworth* has established her fame amongst the few great names of contemporary sculptors. It is her belief that 'at the moment we are creating a new mythology', and her deep affinity to the art of the Neolithic builders of stone monuments 'standing throughout Cornwall and Brittany as memorials to long-forgotten dead', which makes her one of the pillars of this Cornish Renaissance. The influences on the younger generation were moral and formal, and I may be allowed to quote here what Winifred Nicholson wrote of the earlier years of common work and belief: 'This seems to me to have been more than a time of inspiration: surely it was an opening up of the doors of life! A flame burned between them.'

From the time of Whistler and Sickert, Turner before them, and the Swedes Anders Zorn and Carl Wilhelmson after them, painters stayed regularly in St. Ives and finally formed the St. Ives Society of Artists. With the formation of the Penwith Society of Arts in Cornwall (1949) a new chapter of the development in Cornwall has been begun. The gulf between the arts and crafts is being bridged and a deplorable tendency towards a commercialization of the arts overcome. Though no exclusiveness of schools and -isms is being admitted, I see in this breach a definite sign of the fight between the inspirational sources of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How various the new influences were has already been indicated. Before dealing with some of the most promising of the young artists it must be pointed out that there

is no possibility of mentioning all of them, and even among the older generation only some have been named. But I am not writing the history of the arts in Cornwall; I wish only to describe some of its creative aspects in recent times.

I

John Wells (b. 1907) decided to give up his practice as a doctor in the Scilly Islands in 1945, at approximately the same age as that at which the bank official Gauguin decided to devote the rest of his life to painting. At fifteen he did some water-colours and a few oil paintings too; in Ditchling he was attracted by the standard of craftsmanship which had flourished there since the days of Eric Gill. The year 1927, was a decisive one for him, when at Feock near Falmouth he spent some time with Ben Nicholson, Kit Wood and Winifred Nicholson. 'Ben always drawing, Kit only looking around, Winifred painting out of doors directly.' Wells soon felt the formal impact of Ben Nicholson's work. Later Gabo's too. There is a lyricism in him, however, which brings him nearer to Paul Klee. He now lives in the Newlyn of the impressionist Dod Procter and the primitive painter Mary Jewels, in the old studio of Stanhope Forbes which he has been re-building for two years, an experience which has certainly had an influence on his art. For if there is any one of these young people in West Penwith who knows that a construction in art must be as solid and fundamental as a building it is John Wells. And he also feels that forms and colours have a symbolic value, and that a picture is not only a surface pattern but that it has an inner structure rather than only a decorative one. 'My life is still unsettled,' he told me, 'and art goes hand in hand with it. I wish to harmonize everything: my knowledge, my life, my art.' In his paintings John Wells tries to give expression to the lyrical and mystical moods of his being. 'Daffodil, Hyacinth - what beautiful names flowers have got. I turn them in my mouth, I taste them,' he said. One evening somebody sung old folk-songs in the fishing

harbour. John Wells listened a long time. 'They are genuine, these songs,' he said 'and so simple and so vigorous. Life was interwoven with spirit once, the tissue of which the life of man is made was otherwise than to-day ...' And probably thinking of somebody whom he remembered in this connexion, he continued: 'What a strange experience is a human face. I have often pondered on that.' There is a quality in John Wells which will develop in spite of all difficulties he has had to face and will one day burst into flower. 'So all around the morning air,' we read in a letter of his to Sven Berlin, 'and the sea's blue light, with points of diamond, and the gorse incandescent beyond the trees; countless rocks, ragged or round and of every colour; birds resting or flying, and the sense of a multitude of creatures living out their minute lives ... all this is part of one's life and I want desperately to express it: not just what I see but what I feel about it and beyond it ... But how can one paint the warmth of the sun, the sound of the sea, the journey of a beetle across a rock, or thoughts of one's own whence and whither? That's one argument for abstraction. One absorbs all these feelings and ideas: if one is lucky they undergo an alchemistic transformation into gold and that is the creative work.'

Peter Lanyon (b. 1918) wrote once to John Wells: 'The tendency is to say: I want to make a construction, not I want to construct.' These words throw a light upon Lanyon's development, which, one might say, is undergoing its third stage. The first was a love of colour expressed in landscape paintings and encouraged through conversations with Adrian Stokes. But it did not satisfy him. The form was too nebulous, though there was a great spontaneity of expression. In 1939 Lanyon met Ben Nicholson. His white reliefs and Barbara Hepworth's sculptural form impressed him by their discipline. But I think that it was Gabo who influenced him most deeply. It was not his theory that gave him certainty but his style and his personality. If Wells is the mystic, then Lanyon is the thinker amongst the young Cornish generation of painters. It was the philosopher in Gabo that

struck a note for ever in him. Now he is in process of freeing himself, trying to find his own ego. 'There is another standard' (than that of Gabo), we read in the same letter; 'and that is the language of form itself and of colour, but a too intense affection for this language may lead to manipulations of plastic form, an arrangement and not a construction. It appears to me that I must deny firstly the accepted image of "landscape", or "face", or "bottle", anything for that matter, and construct a new image which relates to neither, but to all.' Lanyon wants to identify himself with his motifs. 'Identification with a place by walking-climbing ... within this place. Approach to the place from different aspects.' He speaks of 'concentration on detail and an acceptance of a part of a whole' and comes to the climax: 'I see no reason therefore why the final construction should not be as representational as any academic picture, containing the elements of this sort of picture not for representation but as parts of an image ... We do not make pictures, we "construct" reality, make a new image that will help others to construct an image of man. Whether it is inhuman or cold or sad or perfect is all beside the point.' And what is such a construction, such an image? Lanyon says: 'It has been lived and made and revealed by me, living in this life, for the purpose of revealing some microscopic part of a whole; it belongs to the whole and is itself a whole and is an aspect of the whole.' Lanyon has recently painted a Generation Series, inspired by his thoughts and his feelings during the nine months before the birth of his first child. These real, super-real facts are expressed through specific formal elements (like a spiral, the shape of a womb, landscape forms, animal symbolism, etc.). I feel that his thought, the enjoyment of painting and the problems of the formative process are still separate in his work, that they are in an analytical stage, on the verge perhaps of changing into an organically synthetical stage. Lanyon is conscious of the slow process of growth and integrity, and I believe one might say that his images are not only concerned with him personally. In his restless,

sometimes aggressive, but always sincere mind something is developing which can give shape to unseen though not unreal things.

II

Once, I remember, when making a tour of Land's End during the autumn, I imagined that I was transported into the stark landscape of Dante's *Inferno*: the faded bracken, yellow gorse like tongues of flame playing round the grey rocks, the cold grey sky and the barely distinguishable line separating the rock-strewn land from the leaden surface of the sea. This wild, lonely view, which makes one think of the first days of creation, this waste land was for some time the environment of D. H. Lawrence, who lived near Zennor during the last war. I never said what I really felt; perhaps I am nearer the Mediterranean, I thought. I was therefore astonished to read the following conversation contained in one of the writings of *Sven Berlin* (b. 1911): 'A friend looks at me in a pub: "This is the end, he says: this is the Dead Land, the Cactus Land!"'

'"Never! No, never! This is the Live Land! We are magicians. We make things out of our dreams and out of the desolation - things that live!"'

'He looks at me sadly and repeats: "This is the Waste Land - the End ..."'

'But I cannot tell him how I feel, how I quiver with so much tension, how each spark of sunlight beyond the window is a nerve ending in my own body ... Somehow, suddenly, on the edges of one's life one sees a boy carrying a blue lobster down a back street, a Victoria Carnival in Scilly - and the whole world becomes magic ... A Woman with a Yellow Cat, A Golden Cockerel, A Man Carrying a Fish.'

From this piece of writing one can already deduce that Berlin is a romantic. Romantic in the sense of the nineteenth century, with the same protest against civilization. He is an artist who has little access to rational and scientifically based speculations. And as romanticism always involves

a chaotic element, he has great difficulty in finding not only a formula but even a medium for his intellectual tensions. An incessant worker, he has still not decided whether to be a painter and draughtsman, a writer or a sculptor. Perhaps he will be able to work in many directions. The artist who meant most for him in his painting period was Rouault. He then produced pictures in Gesso Grosso, i.e. on a thick layer of plaster forming low reliefs which he covered with paint. It was an experimental stage. He is at his best in stylized drawings and monotypes of animal shapes – lobsters, fishes, etc. – and without doubt also in some of his writings. He is the author of a monograph on Alfred Wallis and this, together with two other books he is preparing, the first on the creative development in Cornwall, and the other of a more biographical nature, poems, articles and illustrations, complete the picture of his work. His main activity during the last years has been concentrated on sculpture. As he was a dancer for some time, he realized through Adrian Stokes the link between the plastic arts and music – something which, on a different cultural level, was so obvious in Indian life. As a sculptor he is the heir of those who fought for direct carving which revitalized the whole outlook on sculpture: Brancusi, Gill, the early Epstein, G. Brzezka as predecessors, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Skeaping in the years between 1921 and 1929. Berlin knows that ‘images are buried everywhere, not only in the earth, the rocks, the forest, but also deep in the mind: images that have been made already and those not yet created ...’

If he succeeds in capturing them, he will be able to give a new romantic picture of this Cornwall which he loves.

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham is a young Scottish painter who settled in St. Ives in 1940. Finding herself at the age of twenty to be too much of an emotional worker, she began to cultivate disciplined forms and found her affections turning towards Braque, Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson. A conscientious artist, she has for years undergone a series of self-imposed disciplines: first she studied

drawing almost entirely from nature; then compositions, limiting herself deliberately to using only colours; then textures in various mediums, and mixing mediums to get special effects. Now she is attempting, gradually, to draw all these things close together, like special tools to probe realities. 'When I was young,' she writes, 'I heard a sentence which has haunted me ever since: "If you can paint a good grey, you can handle any colour." I was born in a grey town, by a grey sea, in St. Andrews, Fife. Cornwall has greys similar to the greys of Scotland.' The first Cornish pictures of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham showed a narrative naïveté, and fine greys were predominant. But she wanted more. She wanted to reach deeper realities 'not by means of descriptive incidentals, but by dispensing with them, a process of laying bare.' In Cornwall she wanted to suggest 'the eeriness of age from within rocks, under the ground.' Though her link with abstraction is clear, she seldom did a purely abstract painting. A short stay in Switzerland during 1949 hastened this side of her development and in her glacier studies she has reached not only material beauty - in a kind of offset-technique, developed by Paul Klee - but also a musical beauty through abstract forms derived from the tremendous impact the mountain world of the Alps made on her. 'I like', she writes, 'to see nature in motion working on and changing itself: rocks, walls, moss, stones, pebbles, rust, granite surfaces, fungi, sea pools, branch barks.' This is also the method of her working.

III

I have room only for a few words on other young artists of Cornwall, about whom I hope one day to write more fully.

Bryan Winter (b. 1915). I think specially of a gouache by him made in 1948: *Birds Disturbing a Town*. In single works like this he has achieved mastership. Winter came out from the magical laboratory of Picasso and the cubist theories with an integral inner view; an artist who can effect such a transmutation of things, rhythms and sensations is a pure

poet. And in his work particularly I see how the Cornish landscape and its interpretation through modern artists of an older generation is creating something which may perhaps come to be known as the Cornish Style.

Tom Early (b. 1914), who started to paint in 1946 (before that practising as a doctor), is also bewitched by the Cornish landscape. 'Any scene which has mystery appeals to me ... Sea, cliffs, clouds; tin mines, of which there are hundreds scattered around in various states of decay, the china-clay dumps which form a landscape like that of the moon seen through a telescope.' Early is a primitivist with a freshness of approach to a motive astonishing for an intellectual who, apart from his science, has been devoted to other arts – music, poetry, the novel. I feel that the work of Alfred Wallis has given Early the courage to embark on the adventure of painting, and it may be hoped that his experiments to acquire a good painter's technique will not deprive him of his eye's talent for looking with a child's innocence upon the world in which he lives.

Denis Mitchell (b. 1912) is a painter without any art schooling. Interested in painting, since his youth, especially landscapes without figures, he worked in his spare time with the traditional St. Ives painters as his only orientation. It was Adrian Stokes, during the war who first interested him in modern art. Mitchell has been a tin miner, a fisherman and a gardener. 'I have worked on the ground, then under it and then outside it. I saw it from three angles and now I hope in time to interpret and express some of the peculiar qualities of this most interesting part of the world. I must develop myself very slowly with an open mind, seeing and taking everything in, but being as little influenced as possible. That is why I have not struck out in the abstract way, as I do not feel excited by it.' Mitchell's landscapes, mostly of small size, are lyrical impressions in fine pastel values of greys, lavender tones and misty greens.

Two years ago *David Houghton* came from London to join this group of young artists in Cornwall. He lives on a farm

in Nancledra, far from all communications, in solitude. 'For some time it was so strange to me, this curious landscape, that I was able to do little ... But since last summer I have been painting landscapes with patchwork green fields, and simple white cottages. I think painting should be local in inspiration.' With the example given him by MacBryde and Colquhoun, Haughton's art was also influenced by the drawings and writings of Percy Wyndham Lewis, by the paintings of Ben Nicholson, Klee and Picasso. There is a great sensitiveness in him to colour and form, and in figure compositions a certain inclination towards old masters like Piero della Francesca.

Artists arise here and there in Cornwall, as the granite pierces the Cornish soil. The hardest element of the earth, the granite, and its most sensitive, the human heart, join here in the eternal rhythm of birth and re-birth, to achieve the work of art as a witness of creation.

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